Denise Robins

Bitter-Sweet

BITTER-SWEET



So that she might forget the unhappy love affair with Clifford Culver, the beautiful and tempestuous Raine is sent to stay with her grandmother in the South of France, little realising that Clifford is a handsome philanderer playing a double game in order to get his hands on the fortune that she will one day inherit.

His duplicity is discovered by a young Frenchman who has already fallen passionately in love with Raine, but the situation is to become even more tragic and involved before each of them finds the love and happiness they both desire.

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This One Night
The Tiger in Men
The Uncertain Heart
he Unshaken Loyalty
Venetian Rhapsody

Denise Robins

Bitter-Sweet

For

ADA MOURGEON-HUILLARD

with my love

It was generally accepted that the Ball which Lady Oliventt gave for her débutante daughter, Jennifer Rose, was one of the big successes of Coronation Year. Society was there *en masse*; some of the loveliest girls in England. The dance took place in a famous hotel overlooking the river. The May night was cloudless and warm, and the light of the stars seemed to dip into the water. At times couples drifted outside to get away from the heat of the ballroom in which the scent of the flowers had become overpowering.

Jen [illegible]
side— [illegible]
laughi [illegible]
sweet tonight in her crinoline dress of pink spangled tulle.

Lady Oliventt stood beside Rose, her sister-in-law, looking every inch the proud pleased matron and said:

'Well, I think Jennifer's going to pull it off. I'm sure [illegible]

[illegible]

room, searching the dancers for her own daughter.

'Have you seen Raine lately, Maud?'

Lady Oliventt had just at that moment noticed the fact that her niece had left the room with a young man named Clifford Culver. But she did not say so to poor dear Rose. She knew how Rose detested young Culver.

Really, she was sorry these days for Rose, who was a conventional and wholly English type in her way. But she had, Lady Oliventt reminded herself, a French mother and Raine had inherited a great deal of her temperament from the Comtesse de Chagny. Well—what with the French blood, and an Irish grandmother on the other side, what could one expect?

When Raine had 'come out' last year she had been noted as one of the most beautiful débutantes presented at Court. Too emotional and artistic—her Ladyship was glad that her Jennifer was neither of these things. Talent seemed to go hand in hand with trouble. And poor Rose had so set her heart on Raine making a good marriage and settling down.

Rose Oliventt, left to herself, wandered around still searching for the truant Raine, whose grandmother said she had not seen her for some time. Rather bitterly, Rose regarded the Comtesse. At sixty-five she was still magnificently handsome, and charmed everybody with her wit and humour, and that touch of the *grande dame* which so distinguished her. She wore black lace (Balmain), the Chagny diamonds, long white kid gloves, and carried an ostrich feather fan. She made everybody else in the room look insignificant. Her daughter respected and admired her. But they had never really understood each other. Now, there was an armed truce between them, which had existed ever since Rose married Michael Oliventt and left France.

The Comtesse had only one great interest and love these days—her granddaughter. She adored Raine. In her own youth, Adrienne de Chagny had had scores of young men at her feet—she understood emotions. She had suffered greatly during the last war and been financially reduced, like so many members of the French nobility. But she was still a wealthy woman, and owned one of the most beautiful places in the South of France. Raine was her sole heiress.

Mrs. Olivent reflected that although the Comtesse spoiled Raine, she would share at least one view with her daughter Rose. She would not want Raine to become entangled with Clifford Culver—who was unworthy of her.

It was so maddening that Clifford was asked everywhere, because he was an eligible bachelor and came of a good family. Clifford was nearing thirty. Recently, following the death of his father, he had become the head of his firm.

Mrs. Olivent was never quite sure what Clifford *did*. . . . She only knew vaguely that the 'business' was connected with spare parts for cars and that Clifford owned a big factory on the Great West Road. But she had lately heard rumours that he was rapidly spending all the money his father had made and that 'Culvers Ltd.' were not too prosperous. She was positive, anyhow, that Clifford was after Raine for her money more than for her youth and beauty. That terrified the mother.

In addition, Clifford had been scandalously connected with one or two girls, and once with a married woman in a case in which he had narrowly escaped being cited as co-respondent. In other words, Mrs. Olivent loathed him, and could not understand why Raine preferred him to any of the nice boys she had so far met.

She wished that Michael, her husband, had not died so young. He had been one of the youngest Members of Parliament. He had succumbed to a fatal operation while he was visiting the Far East. *He* might have helped control Raine; it was so difficult managing her alone, Rose Olivent thought.

Despairingly, she abandoned the search through the ball-room for Raine, and told herself that she must insist upon the girl leaving London with her directly after the Coronation. They would accompany the Comtesse to France. There—in the de Chagny mountain retreat behind Cannes—Raine would be safe from *that man*.

(which was how Rose always alluded to Clifford Culver). She must stay there until she got him out of her blood. Thank heaven, the mother's thoughts ran on, Raine was still under age. She could not marry anybody without her mother's permission for another six months.

2

On the Embankment, a young girl wearing a fur coat over her evening dress, stood beside a tall good-looking man in 'white tie and tails'; her hand clasping his. They leaned over the balustrade, watching the fascinating Neon lights glittering across the water. Now and again they turned and gazed at each other long and ardently.

'Oh, it's wonderful out here with you, Cliff,' the girl said in a low voice. 'If only we needn't go back to all those other people. *Why, why* can't we get into one of those little tugs, vanish down the river and never come back?'

'You are exquisitely impracticable, my darling,' Clifford Culver laughed, and lifted her hand to his lips.

She shivered as she felt the ardour of his kiss. She was madly in love with him. He knew it and played on her emotions as a musician plays upon the strings of a sensitive instrument.

He was in love with her, too, in his way. Looking at her, his pulses quickened. He remembered the supple arms of her while she had been dancing a few moments

under the fur coat she had slipped over her bare shoulders. Shoulders as smooth and pale as ivory. Her face, too, was pale. She rarely had any colour.

He was crazier about her than he had been about any of the 'others'. Pretty girls attracted Clifford as light at-

tracts a moth, but he was cleverer than the moth. It was never he who singed his wings. But Raine was different. He wanted to marry *her*. But he had to be cautious despite the deep underlying passions which he knew existed within her. She was reserved and fastidious—sometimes so serious about life and love that it frightened him. He, himself, was not serious-minded. Life for him was one long amusement. He was not even good at business. Too lazy; too fond of the 'flesh pots', and too selfish.

His prevailing passion was for expensive cars (and, of course, expensive women to drive in them with him). He had liked racing at Brooklands, and this year he had entered for the Monte Carlo Rally, but was not placed.

But the thing that Clifford needed most at the moment was—money. He was in love with Raine but even more so with the small fortune which she would inherit both from the old French grandmother, and her late father, once she came of age.

There was also that superb old monastery in St. Candell, near Mougins, which the Comtesse's ancestors had converted, and she was still restoring. Clifford would enjoy being part-owner of a property and a fortune near Cannes. *Just the job!*

A deep sigh from Raine.

'I suppose I'll have to go back. It was mad of me to run out here with you like this.'

'It's delicious to be mad, isn't it, sweet?' he murmured, and smiled down at her sideways in that whimsical fashion which always made her heart melt. She was so defenceless and lovely—the moonlight gleaming in her large dark grey eyes. He looked at the slenderness of her, the sculptured lines of the small head (dark hair cut short with a crisp curving wing brushed from the brow), and he found her irresistible.

'I love you,' he whispered. 'I daren't kiss you and smudge your lips, but . . . oh, my dear! . . . you don't know what you do to me!'

'You have the same effect on me,' she said, and gave an excited little laugh. When she laughed Raine was immensely gay. Yet she could look too sad for her twenty years; as though all the sorrow and poetry of Ireland and the coquetry of her French ancestors mingled in her eyes

He grumbled:

'Why the heck does your mother have to dislike me?'

'I just don't know! I find it so hard to forgive her for it, darling. But I shall *never* give you up no matter what she says.'

'Oh well—in a year's time you can do what you like.'

'Will you mind if she cuts me off without a shilling when I elope with you?'

'Of course not!' said Clifford heartily. (But he had taken pains to find out that most of the money that Michael Oliventt had left, was in trust for his only child so there was nothing Rose could do about that!) And there was nothing the old Comtesse could do, either The old monastery of Candella, and all the de Chagny property, must eventually pass to Raine

Raine gazed up at Clifford with her misty adoring gaze. She found him wonderful. Right from the start six months ago, when she had first danced with him, she had thought: 'This is *it*! I've found the one I want!'

She had always admired tall fair men—perhaps because she, herself, was slight and dark. There was just a glint of red in Cliff's thick bright hair Because he spent most of his time in open cars he was deeply tanned, which made his eyes seem a light bright blue He gave one the impression of being stronger and more muscular than he was, because of the width of his shoulders. He dressed with taste. Raine admired his suits and his choice of ties. And he was so *amusing*—so full of enthusiasms. She could see that other girls were always trying to attract his attention He was utterly *charming* At the end of his first dance he had tightened his hold of her and said:

'So this is Raine! London's loveliest débutante—well, none of the pictures I've seen of you in the *Tatler* could give one the least notion of how beautiful you are.' Then he had added softly: '*Raine*. Just the perfect name! Those dark grey eyes hold the shadowy depths of some enchanted pool full of rain-water.'

Well—that had been the beginning—and the end—for her. Now they were openly, desperately in love. Oh, it was maddening that Mummy didn't like him. Neither did Granny or Aunt Maud. Yet they all admitted he had looks and charm. But Mummy had said the other day:

'He's too *old* for you—and there's something I don't trust about him.'

'Well, I don't care about the women in his past,' Raine had protested. 'Any man as handsome as Cliff is bound to have had affairs. If he loves me now, that is all that matters.'

'I still don't trust him,' had been the obstinate reply. 'Anyhow, you are merely in the throes of a foolish infatuation. He isn't any of the things you *used* to say you wanted; except in looks. You always declared you would marry somebody who understood music, or painting, or books. You aren't the type to want to rush round in sports cars and sit on high stools, drinking at all the smart bars in Europe!'

It certainly wasn't what Raine wanted, but she laughed this off. She thought—as hundreds of girls had thought before her—that even if a man *hadn't* as much in common with you as you might wish . . . it didn't matter so long as you were enough in love. (As she and Cliff *were*.) He was going to teach her to like racing, and he wouldn't interfere if she wanted to listen to music or go to art exhibitions—or ballet—which was her favourite of all recreations.

She had row after row with Mummy over Cliff. Of course, she was sorry in a way, knowing how terribly conventional Mummy was. And that she, Raine, must be

such a disappointment, because she had turned down dozens of proposals from the sort of young men Mummy adored. Yet they had all seemed so feeble and dull and characterless after Cliff. Once, when Mummy had declared that Cliff was just after her money, Raine had thrown a scene with every drop of her French blood to the fore. And when she had threatened to run away just to prove that Cliff would marry her even if she were penniless, Mummy had 'piped down'. But she still forbade Cliff the house. And still nagged and complained if Raine met him at other people's houses. .

Suddenly Raine said:

'I've got something else facing me now. . . .'

'What, darling?'

'Oh, some new protégé of Gammère's to deal with.' (Gammère was Raine's own particular name for her French grandmother.)

'What's it got to do with you?'

'He's a young man whom Gammère thinks is wonderful. One of the impoverished aristocracy now working as an architect and helping Gammère restore the monastery. She says he is most attractive and also has the makings of a great painter, but hasn't had the money with which to indulge his genius. She has invited him to London for the Coronation and Aunt Maud said he could look in at Jennifer's Ball.'

'But he hasn't come, has he?'

'He was going to be very late Some business kept him in Paris and he was catching a plane later this evening. Gammère's taken a room for him somewhere near us'

'Well, I shall be jealous if you give him one smile,' said Clifford lazily.

'If I do it will be a *frozen* one,' she returned with a sudden giggle

He liked Raine when she chose to be gay. The materialistic Clifford could ill appreciate the deeper, more sentimental, side of this young adolescent girl. But

once they were married, he thought, he would soon mould her into his own ways. And, of course, he *would* marry her. He knew that that mother and the old grandma were trying to get her away from him. But he was incurably optimistic and he had secretly calmed down one or two creditors by hinting that his engagement to last year's popular young débutante, Miss Raine Oliventt, would shortly be announced.

'Try and meet me tomorrow, sweet,' were his last words as they entered the hotel again. 'I've got to go along to the factory in the morning but I'll be in the London office about ten. Ring me there.'

He left her to return to the hotel alone so that they would not cause undue gossip. Raine entered the ballroom with a sinking sensation—that sick feeling that she always felt when she had to say good-bye to Clifford. When she was going to meet him it was all madly exciting and she felt able to brave anyone or anything for his sake. But to leave him was to suffer as only the very young and intense know how. The thoughts of these two as they parted were entirely and characteristically different. The young girl deeply in love—loving and suffering for love's sake and with the highest ideals. The man, remembering with satisfaction the money she would inherit and how amusing it would be to see her, not in a conventional débutante's ball-dress, but as a Bohemian—wearing gay tartan stove-pipe trousers, for instance, and a yellow sweater, strolling beside him along the Croisette in Cannes. She had the sort of figure a fellow wanted to show off. And it would be good to get her away from the stiff set in which her conventional mother moved. As his wife, she would be a mad success with his friends.

Raine, walking across the ballroom, came face to face with her mother, smiling and nodding at her friends. Her heart sank as she saw the frozen and deeply disapproving look on Mrs. Oliventt's delicately made-up

I am informed that he has done *something* which I find objectionable. I've told you a dozen times, and I tell you again—he's a fortune hunter and . . .'

'A wicked flirt—a villain—and a wolf . . .' Raine finished, and laughed, digging her teeth into her lower lip. 'How sick I am of this, Mummy!'

'And so am I. But your behaviour this evening ends it,' said Rose Olivентt darkly. 'I've spoken to your grandmother, and we all three leave for Mougins directly after the Coronation.'

Raine's small heart-shaped face grew pale rather than flushed when she was most upset. She turned so white now that her mother seized her arm and shook her a little.

'Don't look like that—I won't have you feeling this way about Clifford Culver.'

'Then drag me to France and keep me there, locked up in Candella, and see if it makes the slightest difference,' said Raine, her breath coming quickly and jerkily. 'I don't care. I shall go on loving him just the same. A thousand miles between us won't make any difference. You'll see. And you'll find out how much he loves me—*me* and not my money. . . .'

She dragged her wrist from her mother and left her standing there. Rose, who was flushed and thoroughly upset, almost wept in public.

Raine was off her head! Rose had heard of young girls going mad about men—this was *awful*—her own well-brought-up daughter to be capable of such *abandon*!

At that moment, Clifford sauntered back into the ballroom. Raine saw him and the sun broke through the darkness for her again. Once more her heart sang to the stars. It was frightening to know that she was to be forced to leave London, and she knew that even Gammère would show her little sympathy. But so confident was she that Cliff would go on loving her, and that once she was

twenty-one, he would take her away even though they disinherited her—she could not be downcast for long.

Then she saw a young man standing beside her grandmother's chair at the far end of the room and her grandmother beckoning to her. She walked across the room to them. She saw a slimly built man, not as tall as Clifford but by no means short, watching her approach. His slenderness of build gave him a youthful look. She guessed at once that he was Armand de Rougement—Gammère's architect—and that he must be about twenty-four or twenty-five.

The Comtesse said:

'Ah! Here comes my granddaughter, Armand. You must dance together, and you may take her in to supper.'

Raine extended a hand. Armand bent over it, and touched it with his lips. He spoke in good English with a slightly clipped accent.

'I'm delighted to meet you, Mademoiselle Oliventt.'

'How do you do,' said Raine coldly.

The Comtesse beamed on them. Lightly she touched Armand's shoulder with the ebony stick which she used on account of her sciatica, which made walking painful.

'Here you see a very clever boy, my dear Raine,' she said. 'He knows more about old buildings and the history of France than anybody I have met of his age. And he paints portraits in his spare time, exceedingly well, too. He shall paint you when we are at Candella.'

'If I may be permitted,' murmured Armand.

'It sounds most exciting,' said Raine in that small cold voice which struck the young man as being a paradox—like the cool remote way in which she looked at him.

'*Mon Dieu*,' he thought, 'with such eyes—such a mouth—she should be full of warmth. The very essence of vital youth. It is all there, somewhere, surely. Yet she appears as glacial as the snow on our beautiful Alps.'

Later, dancing with her, one arm lightly supporting that slender body in the white Victorian dress, he found

her nymph-like grace enchanting. But somehow he became tongue-tied and unable to talk to her as freely and warmly as he would have wished. About so many things—the goodness of her grandmother; the big chance he was having to prove his worth because of the work she had given him, and how much he longed to paint a portrait of *her*, Mlle. Raine.

As a rule, Armand de Rougement was quite at ease with people. Women found him charming and quite friendly as well as studious. But he made no appeal to Raine. He was, to her, just another Frenchman. She did not care much for the French, despite her own mixed blood. She had always had a mind to marry an Englishman and Clifford was her *beau idéal*—for ever. Her large eyes restlessly searched the colourful crowd of dancing couples and found the tall handsome figure of her Clifford. He was dancing with a girl whom she did not know. Tall, fair and rather attractive, dressed in pale yellow. How magnificent Cliff was, thought Raine, towering above all the youths who came to these 'deb dances'.

'When will you be going over to Candella?' She heard Armand's pleasant voice with its faint foreign inflection.

She dragged her gaze away from Clifford. She was jealous because he was smiling down at the girl in yellow who seemed to be enjoying her dance with him. But somehow Raine managed to talk to Armand.

'Quite soon, I believe,' she said.

'Then I hope that you will sit for me.'

'I dare say,' she said indifferently.

He ignored the slight.

'You must be very happy to have such a place as Candella in your family. It is, without exception, one of the most fascinating houses in the South of France.'

As they continued to dance—it was a slow waltz—he began to tell her about the top floor of the old monastery, which had once been a corridor of monks' cells and

which the Comtesse was now rebuilding, turning them [illegible]

timber. And so on—warming to his subject. It became obvious to Raine that Armand was an enthusiast—absorbed in his work, which was why, Raine supposed, her grandmother liked him. She had always been a patroness of the genuine artist.

Raine also became aware—faintly but definitely—that Armand de Rougemont had quite an attractive personality of his own. And his face, she decided, was like one of those Chevaliers in ancient French history, sometimes to be found in old illustrated books. Pale and sculptured with large serious eyes—very dark and thickly lashed. His was a fastidious scholarly face with a touch of melancholy. But when he smiled he looked eager and winning. He had rather rough brown hair, worn shorter than most of the young men of his race, and inclined to curl. Raine, trying to concentrate on Gammère's architect, and being imaginative, could almost see Armand wearing shining armour, storming the walls of some ancient castle during the reign of Charlemagne the Great. A Galahad of a man—a romantic—gentle and courteous. One had to like him But she longed to change places with the girl in yellow who was dancing with Cliff, What a completely different person was Cliff from Armand! So much more worldly, not at all shy. And not often gentle (for he had a streak of hardness which fascinated Raine). Her own intense femininity responded to it.

The waltz with Armand came to an end He thanked her. She said with sincerity :

'It was awfully nice. You waltz well '

He bowed again, pleased with the compliment. She turned away from him to speak to her Cousin Jennifer. As she moved, a white flower fell from her hair Armand

picked it up. It was a gardenia. The waxen petals had been bruised and were turning brown. He put the flower against his nostrils and his head swam suddenly with the intoxication of that same perfume which had been drifting from Raine's hair while they danced. He thought of Candella—the de Chagny sun-lit monastery; his work there; his prospect of seeing Raine daily in the near future, and of painting her in the big room in the Round Tower which the Comtesse had given him as a studio. He had only a small bed-sitting room of his own in Cannes where he lived. His mother was dead; his father had perished with the Maquis soon after the fall of France. Armand had had a hard struggle to earn enough money and to eat enough food to maintain his strength during his professional studies. Now, at last, with *Maçon Frères* (Paris architects, who had an office in Cannes)—and with the patronage of the Comtesse, he was being given his real chance.

He had come to London this evening on business for his firm. To be here at this party tonight with the de Chagny family was a great honour for him and he felt thrilled and happy. Not only to enter for the first time in his life, an English ballroom, and to be among English people, but to see London so gay with lights and decorations for the Coronation of a young, beloved Queen.

He had been happy. Yes! But now, all of a sudden, he felt depressed. Behind that façade of formality and absorption in his work, Armand had the mercurial Latin temperament. Swift, strong emotions. And crushing that flower from Raine's dark hair between his fingers, remembering the grace and beauty of her while they waltzed, he also became aware that there was to be no more peace of mind for Armand de Rougement.

In a single hour, and for the first time in his life, he had fallen desperately in love.

3

Jennifer's dance was over. Out of the big hotel poured a bevy of young men and women, laughing, talking, yawning a little. It was two o'clock in the morning A small cool wind had sprung up and ruffled the river. Sleek cars pulled up at the hotel entrance. One or two reporters had lingered to take photographs. It had all been a great success.

Raine drove back to her Knightsbridge home in the Rolls hired by her grandmother. She was neither talking nor laughing She looked pale and sad. Rose Oliventt was in a good humour now because Raine was safely with 'the family' and That Man was out of it. Rather cattishly she said:

'Did you see Clifford Culver with the pretty fair girl in yellow, Raine? He is driving her home. Did you notice his Jaguar sports-car, Armand?' She turned to the young Frenchman who was seated opposite Raine, looking not at the streets of London through which they moved, but at the sorrowful face of the young lovely girl.

She could not know it, but the gardenia she had worn in her hair lay in his pocket. Sentimental, like a Victorian, he would not part with it. And she would not look at him but stared out of the window. He would have liked to have said or done something to drive that sadness from her sombre eyes. He knew, of course, that she was in love He had watched her dancing with the Englishman whom they called Clifford Culver and had noticed how her whole face lit up while she talked to

him. He would have given the world to have her look a *him* in just such a way. He knew, also, that her mothe and grandmother disapproved, for he had heard the tw older women discussing the matter.

Now, as her mother mentioned Clifford's name, Rain looked up. In a sharp little voice she said :

'I don't know that girl. I wonder who she is?'

'A last year's débutante like yourself, my dear,' sai her mother. 'Lilias Fitzbourne—don't you remember Daughter of Fitzbourne the Banker. Mr. Culver alwa chooses young women with money behind them.'

'*Mummy!*' Raine uttered the name in a low angr voice that quivered with resentment.

The Comtesse sighed and tried to make things bett by plunging into a conversation about the forthcomin Coronation day. Quite a pity she was so old, she sai and with such a bad leg, for she would gladly have s on one of those hard benches overlooking the route an watched the procession. It would be unforgettable. Mr Oliventt had not taken seats, she said. They were goin to content themselves with watching the television i their Knightsbridge flat. But if there were any seats g ing begging, cheaply perhaps, she might get a coup and send Raine and Armand.

Armand's eyes lit up.

'That would be magnificent,' he exclaimed. Raine sai nothing. She was quivering with the jealous anger evoke by her mother's cruel deliberate attempt to blacken Cli ford's character. She was agonised, too, by the thought the tall fair Lilias Fitzbourne being driven home in Clif Jaguar; at this very moment. Lilias had no mother. H aunt who chaperoned her must be very easy-going an allow her much more rope. *Oh, lucky Lilias! Oh, to b free, able to get away from the family!* thought Raine.

Once back in the big flat, not far from Hyde Pa Corner, where the Oliventts had lived for the last fi

years, the old Comtesse retired to bed. As she kissed Raine, she whispered in the girl's ear:

'I hate to see you so unhappy, my darling, but be guided by your mother and me and do not think too much about this man, Clifford. And be nice to my Armand. He is a charming, sensitive boy, and you will find him interesting.'

Raine flung her arms around her grandmother's neck and kissed her. She adored the old lady. It was her mother whom she blamed for this general antipathy towards Clifford, whose only crime in their eyes was that he was too handsome and popular with the opposite sex. It was not *true* that he only wanted money. He had plenty of his own, he said so And no axe to grind by associating with Lilias Fitzbourne. That Raine *did* know! She was certain of his love for her, Raine.

Deliberately, Mrs. Oliventt made a sly exit from the drawing-room on the grounds that she was going to help Gammère to bed. So Raine was left alone with the young French architect.

He offered her a cigarette She refused it. She did not smoke, she said. She also said that she was tired and going to bed.

Armand's breath quickened while he looked at her She touched her hair and glanced at her reflection in a gilt mirror hanging over the fireplace.

'I seem to have lost the flower from my hair'

He made no answer but flushed The bruised gardenia in his pocket burned a hole. He had a ridiculous desire to throw himself at her feet and ask what he could do for her. But he could only say.

'*Madame la Comtesse* has asked me to take you out tomorrow afternoon What would you like to do? A drive? A cinema? A matinée?'

Raine bit her lip, angry and frustrated. Just before leaving the ballroom, she had whispered to Clifford that she would call upon him at the house in Regent's Park

where his widowed mother lived with an old aunt. The two old ladies went for a drive in the park every afternoon. He would see her alone for a little while. She had promised to go. She needed those few moments alone with him; she ached to be held in his arms and kissed. It was so rarely that she could get away to a secret meeting.

Now that she knew she was to go to France—to be removed from him altogether—she felt desperate. Suddenly, she looked intently at Armand de Rougemont. Her feminine instinct told her that he was immensely attracted by her. And with that slight touch of ruthlessness which lies in every woman, no matter how soft or gentle, she decided to make use of that attraction. She said:

'Armand—you must, by the way, call me *Raine* and not *Mademoiselle*—Armand, you do so much to help Gammère. As you know, her whole heart lies in the restoration of Candella. I think we should all be grateful to you for this great interest that keeps her alive and well.'

He was surprised and grew speechless with happiness because Raine said such things but as he began to state, modestly, that he was paid for the work he did and that it was his pleasure and pride to be allowed to work in the monastery, Raine interrupted. Her whole soul was bent on seeing Clifford tomorrow. It would be intolerable to have to spend the whole afternoon with Armand. So she flung herself on his mercy. She told him about Clifford and their love for each other.

'You see,' she ended, 'what a position I am in. I am not of age. I have to get my mother's permission to marry. She has taken an uncalled-for dislike to the man I have chosen. He isn't what she thinks he is, I assure you. Oh, Armand, you don't know how unhappy I am! I'm telling you, a stranger, all this, yet I find it difficult to talk about it to my dearest friends.'

The young Frenchman stood silent a moment. He smoked quickly and nervously. He had been taken aback by her confession, although to be made her confidant was an enormous honour. He was thrilled when she drew close to him—so close that he could catch that irresistible perfume of her hair and see at near quarters the pearly, exquisite texture of her skin. He tried to remember what Clifford Culver looked like, to form an unprejudiced opinion. But he was filled with secret dislike of any man whom Raine Oliventt could love so madly. Here, then, was all the fire and passion he had suspected was hidden behind her mask of cool disdain. Now her secret and true nature were revealed to him. But all that torrent of feeling was for another man, Clifford Culver, of whom her mother and grandmother disapproved.

She placed Armand in an impossible position.

'I will go out with you tomorrow, Armand,' she said; 'but I ask you as a great favour—please just give me half an hour to call on my . . . on Clifford. You see we had arranged to meet . . . it isn't that I don't *want* to go out with *you*. I *do* want to show you London, but I must just see Cliff alone for a few moments. I beg you, as a great friend. I rely on your kindness and tact. . . .'

She broke off. He saw her pallor and emotion and hardly knew what to answer. He only knew that she affected him in a way that made his senses swim and that he would like to love and serve her for the rest of his life. He had lived too much alone. There had only, so far, been one woman in his life: a young French girl in Cannes who had fallen very much in love with him. But the pursuit had come from her side. He had tried to love her because he had often thought it would be a fine thing to have a wife and home . . . but the attempt had failed. Poor Yvonne had failed to stir him for more than a fleeting moment to passion or tenderness. He had put an end to the affair, knowing that he could never marry her.

But in Raine Oliventt he found the aswer to his quest

for love—to the sun and moon and stars. She was all that any man could ask for in this life. But here she was, begging him to aid and abet her stolen meeting with another man.

Raine looked at him anxiously.

'Are you shocked?'

Now he laughed. He replied in French.

'One cannot be shocked by a confession of love. It is charming and demands sympathy. I only hope, *Mademoiselle* . . . I mean Raine . . . that this gentleman is the right one for you.'

'I assure you that he is.' Raine spoke in Armand's own language and he was enthralled because her French was so pure.

For months now he had worked at Candella. He had found Raine's grandmother all that a distinguished and wonderful old lady should be. Raine seemed truly of her flesh and blood—a de Chagny rather than an Oliventt, he thought. He was anxious to do anything that she asked—anything on earth.

'You *must* be happy,' he stammered. 'I will hire a car; we will tell *Madame la Comtesse* and Mrs. Oliventt that we are driving to see your Zoo. I have never seen the London Zoo. . . .' He laughed. 'It is Regent's Park—near this . . . this gentleman's home—is it not?'

'Yes, it is. And I think you're a poppet!' Raine exclaimed, relieved and excited now that she saw that she was not to be deprived of her meeting with Clifford. Her big eyes, dewy with dratitude, regarded her new friend and ally. She decided that he was very nice indeed and that he had a sense of humour and understanding. She liked him.

'What fun! . . . yes—we'll go to the Zoo. I'll show it all to you. I won't stay long with Cliff—I promise.'

He bowed. He felt amply rewarded . . he felt that they were no longer strangers, if she placed such confidence in him. Of course, he would be guilty of helping

her deceive her mother. That thought alarmed him. But this beautiful enchanting girl already held him in the hollow of her slender hand and he was her slave. At the same time, he would like to know more about Clifford Culver. He must watch over Raine. He *must* for she was to be his responsibility tomorrow.

When she said good night, she thanked him again for his sympathy. She left him to smoke another cigarette alone—and to calm down, standing there in the big, handsomely furnished sitting-room in which there were several pieces of French furniture which made him feel quite at home; obvious legacies from Candella. Later, he returned to his hotel.

He hardly slept that night—his mind full of Raine and this newly discovered love at first sight which had shattered him. He also thought a great deal about Clifford Culver and all that had been told of him.

In the morning Raine went out with her mother and grandmother. Armand took himself down to the City where he had a business date on behalf of his employers. He had seen Raine after breakfast, and she had said:

'Till this afternoon then—the Zoo—at half past two.'

'Now that *will* be nice,' Mrs. Olivettt had put in, and beamed upon them both It made Armand feel as guilty as a truant schoolboy. But Raine's big eyes shone at him with an encouraging and rewarding radiance And he was enthralled to share any kind of secret with her—even this one. But the moment he was away from her, he was miserable again. He brooded over the thought of her forbidden passion for the Englishman; agonised by the prospect of having to leave her alone with him this afternoon.

He decided that he must get to know Clifford. It would be better if he could *like* the man and feel able to side sincerely with Raine in this matter. And after all, why shouldn't she marry the man she loved? Armand knew all too little about him, but last night Raine had

told him some of the facts about Cliff's business, his factory and his London office.

Armand conceived, suddenly, the absurd plan of making himself personally known to Clifford. He would judge for himself what manner of man he was. Armand looked in the telephone directory and found that Clifford Culver's office was in Theobalds Road. *Spare parts for motor-cars* . . . Raine had said. Well . . . Armand could call at the office and ask to speak to Mr. Culver; he would think up some inquiry about the prices of such things, and compare them with prices in France.

Drawn as by a magnet, full of curiosity, Armand went along to see Clifford. The office was at the top of a building, and there was no lift. Armand started to climb the narrow dusty staircase. Half-way up he hesitated. No—this was ridiculous—he would go down again, he thought, and turned. Then he paused. He had heard voices from the floor above. First a rather high-pitched girl's voice; Armand could hear clearly what she said:

'Are you sure you can't get away from your silly old work even for an hour, Cliff darling?'

'Cliff darling!'

Armand de Rougement echoed these words to himself, startled . . . and instantly suspicious. Two people were coming down the staircase. Then a man's voice, which was that of Clifford Culver, reached Armand:

'Can't possibly manage it, Lilias, my sweet. Too busy. But this evening, as arranged, yes. And now be a good girl and don't come to my office any more or you'll cause a scandal with the staff.'

'Who cares. Do you love me?' (Her voice again.)

'More, I'm crazy for you, angel,' Clifford replied.

Armand waited to hear no more. His face burning, he walked out into the street. He felt that he had overheard something quite horrible. The name *Lilias* struck a note. *Of course.* That was the girl of whom Mrs. Oliventt had

been talking last night; the girl in yellow who Clifford had driven home.

So Raine's family were right! Clifford Culver *was* what they thought him—a cad and a rotter—carrying on a love-affair with two girls at the same time. With Raine and Lilias. And beautiful, passionate Raine loved and believed in him with all her heart and soul.

This was the man she had asked Armand to help her meet secretly this afternoon!

Armand walked down Theobalds Road in the bright May sunshine, and asked himself in deep dismay what he ought to do about it.

4

Raine was in good spirits at the moment that Armand drove her away from the block of flats in which she lived. The young man sat in his corner of the hired car watching her in embarrassed silence. She looked cool and fresh on this warm afternoon, dressed, he reflected, as only a well-bred English girl could be, in that beautifully-tailored grey linen suit with crisp white collar and cuffs. With it she wore neat tan shoes. A tan leather, bucket-shaped, bag was slung over one shoulder on black patent straps. A burnt straw hat sat straightly on the small dark head. And the French touch of chic was there in that red rose pinned to the collar, and in the perfection of those French suède gloves, brought to her from Paris by her grandmother. Raine was smiling and pleased with life. She was going to see the man she loved. But that fact depressed Armand so much that he could hardly bring himself to smile or chat with her.

He had had a horrid morning and walked for an hour through the City after leaving Clifford Culver's office trying to make up his mind what to do. By the end of that hour—and the rest that followed—he remained undecided. He had lunched with the manager of a firm of English decorators who were connected with *Maçon Frères* and he was sure the English businessman must have thought him very stupid. He had been so *distrait*, unable to erase from his memory the sound of Clifford's lazy voice speaking intimately to that girl on the staircase.

Armand was tormented by the thought of sweet, lovely Raine—Raine with all her pride and self-confidence—being entangled with such a monster. '*Un monstre*', as Armand privately termed him. A perfidious wolf who could lead two girls at the same time down the garden path (was not that how they put it, in English?) And Armand could think of Clifford in other terms in his own language, too Nothing was too bad for him. He ought of *course* to be unmasked, and Raine to be warned. *But by whom?*

Armand had argued the thing out from every angle Above all things he wished to acquaint Raine with the type of man in whom she was placing such complete trust and whom she wanted to marry. For if she knew about Lilias, she would be horrified Yet who was he, Armand, to open her eyes? He was a complete stranger to her. True, he wanted nothing more than to become her devoted admirer and friend for the rest of life. But that gave him no right to interfere in her private affairs.

Equally, he argued, it would not be right of him to let her go on believing that Clifford was worthy of her love and trust.

He wished he had never gone to that office this morning and never discovered Clifford's wretched intrigue. He wished that he had not come to London and fallen in love with Raine at first sight But what was the use of wishing any of these things?

Raine suddenly became aware that she was doing all the talking and that the young Frenchman was being most uncommunicative She looked at him kindly—much more kindly than she had looked last night—because she saw him now as a friend ready to help her; a kind of liaison officer between Clifford and herself.

'How are you liking our London in Coronation mood?' she asked him.

They were driving down the Mall. Leaving Buckingham Palace behind them, they passed through the giant

gilded hoops that bore the royal golden lions on the crest, and passed the huge decorated blue and red stands on either side. The Park was gaily festooned and ready for the momentous occasion soon to take place. Normally it would have excited and interested the young Frenchman. But today he was too deeply troubled. He really could not decide what he should do. Even to breathe a word of his discovery to his great friend and patroness the Comtesse, would be an act of betrayal to Raine which he could not contemplate. And if he were to tell *her* the blunt facts now, this moment, she would probably think he had fabricated them. She would detest him. And he would lose the little confidence that she had placed in him. Or if she decided to confront Clifford with the story, he would only repudiate it, and he, Armand, would be made to look a fool, and be thought a liar. Whatever he did, it would be bad for him. And if by chance she found that he, Armand, was right, she would resent him for evermore for destroying her happiness. Yet, Armand thought, he was prepared to forfeit her friendship if it meant saving her from making such a terrible mistake.

'Armand—you have not answered me.' He heard Raine's voice—cool and with a touch of imperiousness.

'*Pardon*,' he muttered.

'You look upset about something,' she added.

'I am . . .' he suddenly confessed, and his pale face flushed. 'I am worried about this . . . this secret meeting with Monsieur Culver.'

Raine laughed. Her pulses thrilled at the mere sound of Clifford's name; at the thought that the car was speeding now in the direction of Regent's Park and that soon she would be with him; in his arms, experiencing all the subtle magic of his love-making; the two of them lost for a few intoxicating moments to the rest of the world. They had been able to enjoy so few of those moments, for she was rarely out of her mother's sight. And in any

case, even had she had more freedom, there was no place in which they could easily meet alone.

'Oh, you don't need to worry about Cliff and me,' she said lightly. 'I'll take care of that.'

He was fascinated by the dreamy, passionate look that had come over her face while she contemplated the tryst with her lover. If he had paints and canvas now, he thought wryly, he would have liked to have caught that look of warm expectancy in those wonderful eyes with their large black pupils. How intolerable to think that all that passion was for a man who was unworthy, and who within a few hours from now, would be meeting another girl.

Armand was tempted to stop this car and jump out of it, and disassociate himself from Raine's amorous project. He would not be a party to it. At least if he could not interfere and warn her, he could refuse to have anything to do with it. In desperation he said .

'I regret this. You may think it odd of me, but I beg to be excused.'

She stared at him wide-eyed.

'But, Armand, you can't let me down now. Cliff expects me . .'

He interrupted, his heart beating rather fast.

'Bien! Go to your meeting, but please do not include me.'

She looked [illegible]

[illegible] It's going to be [illegible] ou are not with me, and we don't link up again at the Zoo, then go back together.'

'You're asking something too difficult,' he said, biting his lips

'I can't see why it need be at all difficult for *you*,' she protested.

She was annoyed because she thought he was acting like a prig and trying to make *her* feel guilty.

'Oh, I suppose you may think it wrong of me to deceive my mother and Gammère,' she broke out, 'but I only ask for half an hour so that I—I can talk to Cliff alone. Perhaps you've never been in love so you can't understand what it means.'

'Perhaps,' he echoed the word, pale again. He had never dreamed that love could be such torture. Nor that it was possible within so short a space of time to feel so intensely about a woman. And that woman . . . a mere girl, inexperienced and impulsive, ready to fling discretion to the wind and promise eternal fidelity to a man rejected by her family.

With a swift change of mood, Raine leaned forward and touched the young Frenchman on the shoulder with the tip of one small gloved hand.

'Don't regret helping me, Armand. I thought it so friendly of you earlier on. There's nothing very wrong about it, and after all I'm not a child. We aren't living in an age of convention, and lots of girls I know—friends of mine—have boy-friends and go out alone with them for the evening. It is just that *my* mother is particularly strict.'

As well she might be, thought Armand, remembering Lilias, who was to be allowed to dine alone with Clifford Culver tonight.

confront the man himself and warn him that he must not play fast and loose with Raine.

Now Raine was happy again. Armand watched her moodily, and tried to be cheerful until he actually dropped her outside the house. His family occupied the ground-floor flat.

Now, Armand found life most tedious. He got out of the car and walked through the Park, all too conscious of the intrigue he had left behind him. Of Raine and *that man.*

In the big, rather old-fashioned, sitting-room of the Culver flat, Raine stood clasped closely in her lover's arms. Tenderly he had removed her little straw hat, kissed her eyelids, breathed the fragrance of her hair and then closed her lips in a long continued kiss. She returned the embrace with all the tenderness and passion of which she was capable But there was always that touch of reserve—of natural caution which prevented her from completely losing her head—even about Clifford. And soon she drew away from him, patted her hair back into shape, pulled out a chiffon handkerchief and dabbed her lips.

'Cliff darling, I can't go to the Zoo and look at the tigers and lions, with all my make-up spoiled,' she laughed.

The man laughed too, but *at* her rather than *with* her.

'As if you need make-up! You're naturally perfect. And I wouldn't blame the lions and tigers if they wanted to eat you.'

'You say lovely flattering things. All the same there's a poor lonely young man waiting to escort me, and he wouldn't be very edified if he saw me all smeared with lip-rouge.'

Clifford waved the thought of the other man aside. 'That French type! I can't bother about *him.*'

'All the same, we owe it to Armand that I'm here. He's

been awfully sporting and I'm sure he doesn't really approve.'

'Are you certain he won't tell your mother?'

Raine looked quite shocked.

'Of course he won't.'

'I don't trust these foreigners.'

That jolted her a little and Clifford was quick to see it and regret his vulgarity. After all—Raine was half-French. He shouldn't have forgotten. Hastily he covered up by starting to make love to her again. He caught her against him and pressed his cheek against hers.

'I'm crazy about you, darling. *Darling*—if only I could run away with you this very moment!'

She was all his again. He was so adorable, she thought. And after Armand, the pale, fine-drawn young Frenchman, Cliff was truly a magnificently handsome figure. She thought that he was being especially wonderful now, for it was he who calmed down and made her sit on the sofa beside him while he lit a cigarette and talked.

'We've both got to be sensible until the day comes when I really can defy your people and take you away,' he said.

That brought back the remembrance that she was leaving the country in a week's time.

'Oh, Cliff darling—it will be awful—I love St. Candell and France but it is all *so* far from you. Swear that you'll write to me every day, and I'll write to you.'

'Every day,' he said lightly.

'And you'll never, never stop loving me?'

'Never, never,' his blue, lazy eyes caressed and promised her.

But his thoughts were mixed this afternoon. He was a busy man at the moment and finding it difficult to extricate himself from, not one, but several financial tangles. There was trouble with the chaps at the factory, too. He had quarrelled with his under-manager and dismissed him, and at once the men had come out on strike so he

had had to re-engage the fellow. There was nothing Clifford hated more than climbing down to anyone. He was so immensely vain. He liked to be omnipotent. He was [illegible]

ravishingly beautiful and worth a lot of effort and she was going to be very rich. But lately he had made a considerable conquest with Lilias. He looked forward to meeting *her* tonight. And the Lilias-Stakes were rather more favourable. She had no mother to interfere. Mrs. Portal, her aunt, was gay and social and liked him, he believed. The only person he would have to contend with —if it came to contention—was Alec Fitzbourne, her father. Certainly, the big banker would not allow his twenty-year-old daughter to throw herself away. He had too much to leave, and everybody knew he wanted her to net a title. However, neither of these girls would be 'infants' for much longer and then . . . coolly and pleasantly, Clifford reflected upon the fact that if he lost one—there would always be the other.

While Raine looked at him with her serious starry gaze —taking it for granted that his love for her was as deep and as deathless as hers for him—he compared the two débutantes who were both quite madly in love with him. Raine was his preference. Oh, decidedly! There was something very fascinating about little Raine. Lilias was more ordinary. And he didn't care so much for blondes (being fair himself). On the other hand Lilias was 'tall as the gods', and had a remarkably small waist and distracting dimples when she smiled. She was less romantic than Raine—rather more 'down to earth'. That had its points. But she was stupid Quite stupid sometimes.

The half-hour with Clifford passed agonisingly quickly for Raine. And he did not persuade her to stay longer because he had had to leave the office at an awkward moment anyhow in order to keep this rendezvous.

He must get back. Added to which his mother and aunt would be returning. So he had to let Raine go. He was not fundamentally cruel—he wanted her to be happy. Just as he himself wished to be happy. But he had no scruples and little conscience, and his emotions were utterly shallow. He took what life offered *when it was offered*. He was quite prepared to take Raine's devotion and believe while he kissed her perfect lips that he was making her happy; therefore he had nothing to reproach himself with. In the most charming possible way he had entertained her—laughingly showed her photographs of himself as a young man—even as an infant—and some of the family treasures in this Victorian room. He was the child of old parents, he told her. His mother was nearly seventy and worshipped him. Raine could see that, in the touching way in which the old lady preserved every little snapshot of him and even the books he had won for prizes at school. (Prizes for boxing and running.) Clifford was not a book-worm—and admitted it.

'I shall teach you to love books once we are married,' Raine said, blissfully ignorant of the future.

He wouldn't have liked to tell her how much that scared him. He fell asleep whenever he tried to read serious books. When the time came for her to go, he repeated every vow she wanted him to make about being faithful to her and loving nobody else and doing everything he could to get over to the South of France to see her if they kept her too long in the famous old monastery.

She was pale and on the verge of tears when he walked with her to the front door. After all, this might be the last time she would see him before she went abroad because he was having to go up North on business tomorrow. Then there was the Coronation and the very next day—the 3rd June—they were all flying to Nice.

'Oh, Cliff!' she said with a catch in her voice, and gave him a blind, miserable look. He felt quite tenderly towards her. Poor little Raine! He could see what a fatal

fascination he had for her. Lilias faded out of the pic-

[illegible]

must 'see what the form was' and what evolved with old Fitzbourne, once Lilias let drop the fact that he, Clifford, was '*in the running*'.

A moment later Raine was back in the car round the corner of the terrace where Armand waited for her. He greeted her awkwardly, giving her a quick, covert glance. How pale she was! Altered, somehow . . . with a look of suffering that rent his heart *Bon Dieu!* he thought, how much she loved this brute of a man! What had he said to her? What was the position between them? What false promises had he made?

Raine said in a low voice:

'I don't think I can walk round the Zoo, I feel too . . . too exhausted. It's the heat Do you mind if we just go and have tea somewhere?'

He did not mind. He did not want to be in a crowd with her. The Zoo would be full of screaming children on a day like this. So he took her to a quiet café just off Baker Street. It was run by French people and Armand felt at home here with his own people and where he was able to order a good cup of coffee, while Raine drank her favourite China tea. He waited for her to talk Finally she did so—she swallowed all those frantic emotions that hurt her so, and made her feel that life without Cliff was insupportable—and she told Armand how wonderful Clifford was, and how she hoped to be allowed to marry him.

The young Frenchman listened, hardly daring to look into her great soft grey eyes. But finally she forced an opinion from him.

'Do you think it awful that I mean to go on writing to Cliff, and trying to see him? Wouldn't you do the same

if you loved some girl and your parents tried to put an end to it?'

'Yes—I—I'm sure I would,' he stammered.

'The days and weeks will seem so long at Candella completely cut off from him,' Raine added sadly.

Armand put a desperate question to her:

'Forgive me for asking this—but is he—is he quite worthy of so much of your confidence?'

Now the sad shadows on her face lifted. She gave Armand a brilliant smile.

'Absolutely sure,' she said. 'He is just as much in love with me as I am with him.'

Armand gulped his coffee. It was hot and scalded him. He coughed and put a handkerchief to his lips. Then Raine said:

'I'm a selfish little beast. I've spoilt your afternoon in London. How can I make up for it?'

He did not know what to answer. But he felt that by her very smile and the friendliness in her voice she made up for everything . . . everything but the fact that she was throwing her love away on a man who did not deserve it.

If, previously, he had had any doubts about whether he should or should not interfere, they were dispelled now. After this afternoon he was so conscious of Raine's blind infatuation for Clifford Culver that he knew that he *must* try to save her. Stranger though he was, it so happened that he and he alone could help.

After he had taken her back to her home and left her there he took himself off for the second time that day to Clifford Culver's office.

5

When Clifford's secretary announced 'Monsieur de Rougement', Mr. Culver had no idea who the visitor was until Armand walked into the room. Then Clifford was both surprised and annoyed. It was five o'clock. His clerk and secretary were packing up and Clifford had two hours' work alone still in front of him. What the devil did the Frenchman want, anyhow? It couldn't be business—he was an architect—nothing to do with spare parts for cars. But Clifford, always genial until he was personally crossed, greeted Armand heartily.

'Come in, my dear fellow. Sit down. Close day, isn't it? Hope this weather holds for the Coronation. Traffic's perfectly ghastly. It took me half an hour to get through Holborn. By the way—I believe I owe you a spot of thanks for bringing Raine along to see me earlier on.'

He paused. Armand had refused to sit down. His face was stony and unsmiling. His silence made Clifford feel uncomfortable. He added.

'Anything I can do for you? Not interested in cars are you?'

'Not at all,' said Armand.

'How peculiar,' said Clifford with a bellowing laugh, 'I couldn't exist without my Jag. Don't you run a bus?'

'Yes, I have an old small Renault in Cannes.'

'Lucky blighter, living in Cannes. Want any pounds while you're in London? I could do with a few francs over there. Bit of private *marché noire*, eh? . . .' he bellowed again.

Armand froze still further and looked with positive disgust at the big healthy athletic man in his swivel chair. Clifford sat coatless, his shirt-sleeves rolled up. The reddish gold hair clung in damp curls to his forehead. As handsome as the Roman, Mark Anthony, must have been, thought Armand. And as stupid and arrogant. But with one difference. Mark Anthony had been willing to throw away a great career for the love of Cleopatra. This man was much more of an egotist. He would throw away nothing for the love of any woman. He was incapable of such great love. How appalling that so fine and fastidious a person as Raine Oliventt should be in love with such a man. And how typical of life. It so often worked in an ironic fashion. The most incompatible people seemed to fall in love—and marry. But it was more than Armand could endure, to have tó think of Raine married to this good-looking philanderer, this acknowledged fortune-hunter.

'*Monsieur*,' Armand said suddenly and with increased pulse-rate' 'we must come to the point. I am not here on business—nor even on a friendly visit.'

Clifford, who had been in the act of holding a box of cigars out to the young architect, paused, and stared.

'What?'

'It is this,' said Armand. (He had to summon considerable courage for it was a tricky, delicate thing he had to do.) 'I am a friend of Miss Raine's and her family. I have come over to London partly for my firm and partly as a guest of the Comtesse de Chagny . . .' he paused.

'Well—what about it?' put in Clifford, and looked perplexedly up at Armand's clean-cut aristocratic young face.

'I speak with difficulty, *Monsieur*,' stammered Armand.

'Oh, no, you speak our language damned well, *Monsieur*,' said Clifford, misunderstanding him.

'It is not that which I mean. I come here this after-

noon *because I know about you and Miss Oliventt.*'

Clifford's curly golden lashes which women found so irresistible flickered, then he laughed.

'I know you do. So what?'

'I also know,' said Armand, breathing rapidly, 'about Miss Lilias Fitzbourne.'

Clifford's fair skin flushed scarlet. Slowly he stood up. He was several inches taller than the young Frenchman, but Armand held his gaze steadily. Then Clifford said:

'I don't quite get you, de Rougement. I think you'd better explain.'

Armand fought for words. Excellent though his English was, he would have preferred this combat to be in his own language and with one of his own countrymen. He respected the English deeply, and knew that Clifford was far from being a good example of the typical, trust-

honoured me with her confidence. I know she is wishing to marry you one day.'

'Okay,' said Clifford. 'I'm hoping for it, too. But what's it got to do with you?'

'I know that she has immense faith in you, *Monsieur*, and that you do not deserve it.'

Now, Clifford's whole expression changed. He had a very quick temper and it flared up. The sweat pearled on his forehead. He drew the back of his hand across it.

'Hadn't you better be careful what you say? You're treading on dangerous ground. I don't like people butting into my private affairs.'

'And I would not like to see Miss Oliventt's heart broken,' said Armand

'What the hell . . ' Clifford began.

'I was actually here this morning,' broke in Armand. 'As I came up the staircase I overheard, without meaning to, what was said between you and the . . . the other young lady.'

An instant's silence. Clifford had to rack his brains a minute to remember what he and Lilias had actually said on the staircase this morning. He was amazed. So far as he knew, Armand was a comparative stranger to Raine. True, he had acted as their ally this afternoon . . . but that did not give him the right to express his opinions like this, and he meant to tell Armand so. Loudly and angrily, he protested against the interference. He ended:

'It is a damned cheek of you. I resent it bitterly. I'm sure Raine would resent it, too.'

Armand fingered the trilby hat and yellow gloves which he was still holding. His own face grew stubborn. His expression was withdrawn, wary.

'Do you think, *Monsieur*, it would do for you to ask Miss Raine what she thinks about this matter? I shouldn't have thought you wanted her to know?'

'Know what?' shouted Clifford.

Armand shrugged.

'For instance, that you are taking Miss Lilias Fitzbourne out tonight and that you told her that you loved her.'

'I deny that.'

'If I had not heard it, I would not be here now,' said Armand coolly and clearly.

'You don't understand our language.'

Armand put his tongue in his cheek.

'Just now, *Monsieur*, you complimented me upon my English.'

'Oh, go to hell and take yourself out of my office. I tell you I'm not the chap to stand interference. What I do about Raine Oliventt is entirely my own affair.'

'In the name of friendship I have chosen to make it *mine*, also, *Monsieur*.'

'In the name of friendship?' Clifford sneered, 'I rather think it is because you have fallen in love with her yourself. Or do you need a little financial backing from her rich grandmother?'

'I am an architect and what I earn is enough for my needs, *Monsieur*,' said Armand coldly.

'Then go and build your ruddy French houses and keep your mind off Raine Olivent,' snarled Clifford.

'My mind is concerned only with this: that Miss Olivent is deeply in love with you and trusts you absolutely. Therefore, I do not wish to leave this office until I hear you promise to respect her feelings, and put an end to the other affair.'

Clifford stared, then suddenly burst out laughing.

'I think this is rather funny. I don't think I ought to be angry. I ought to laugh.'

'I don't think you had better laugh too much, *Monsieur*,' said Armand. 'Otherwise ...'

'Otherwise, what? You will inform Raine and her family that I am dining out with Lilias Fitzbourne, and that she was in my office this morning, and that I told her that I loved her?'

'Precisely,' said Armand, 'but I would prefer, since Raine is so fond of you, not to administer that hurt to her.'

Clifford looked him up and down in an insulting manner.

'I see. A "*Froggie would a-wooing go*" dressed up as a defending angel!'

Armand de Rougement was not by nature belligerent, but in his veins ran the blood of a man who had died in the Maquis under torture which had not extracted from him one word of information to the enemy. In his veins, too, ran the proud blood of France which would never brook insult. His adversary was physically stronger and weightier and quite obviously used to wearing pugilist gloves, but Armand put down his hat and stick and began to unbutton his coat.

'You wish to fight, *Monsieur*?'

'Listen!' broke in Clifford, his face scarlet, 'we are not in France and duelling is out of date, anyhow. If you're

nterested in Raine—say so—but don't pretend you've come here to save her from *my* clutches. Come, out with it, if you want her for yourself.'

Armand said:

'I hardly know her, *Monsieur*. I do not deny that any man might grow to love her for she is very beautiful and sweet. But she is also very sensitive and if you truly care for her as she does for you I have nothing more to say. I am here to "interfere", as you call it, only because it is I and I alone who knows about Miss Fitzbourne.'

Clifford came closer to him. He doubled his fists. In an ugly voice he said:

'Any more from you, Monsieur de Rougemont and you'll have "had it". Coffee for one and pistols for two, if you like—but *I'll* drink the coffee!'

Armand went white now.

'So you *mean* to go on with this other affair despite the fact that Raine believes herself engaged secretly to you?'

'I shall do exactly what I like,' Clifford snorted the words, 'and it won't profit you, *Monsieur*, to spin a yarn to her about Lilias. I shall only deny it and tell Raine that you are out of your mind. She'll believe me—she always believes anything I tell her.'

He ended with a laugh. It was that arrogant, smug laugh, full of possessiveness, that finished Armand. Blindly he struck out at the leering handsome face of the man who towered above him. In a flash Clifford's fist shot back. One . . . two. It was that straight right and left which had made him quite famous as a boxer at College. The young architect knew a moment of blinding pain and then went down into oblivion.

When he recovered consciousness, he found himself alone in the office. Clifford had gone.

Armand picked himself up, sick and shaking, and bitterly ashamed. A fine champion he had made for Raine! *So poor a fighter that he couldn't defend himself, and to*

little of a diplomat that he had failed completely to make things better for her. All that he had achieved was to make a fool of himself and concede the first round to Clifford Culver.

His head throbbed. He felt so dizzy that he had to balance himself against the edge of the desk. One eye was swelling. As he put a handkerchief up to it, he noticed a sheet of typewriting paper on the desk, addressed to himself. It said:

I suggest you do not try to interfere in my affairs again. You can tell Raine what you damn well like but if you do I shall make quite sure she does not believe what you say. And if she should do so—it will be you who are responsible for her broken heart, not I

Armand put this note into his coat pocket. He felt deeply humiliated, yet within him stirred the implacable desire for revenge. He was not going to let this be his last meeting with Clifford. It was, after all, only Round One, he told himself. And next time he would be more on his guard. There would also, perhaps, be another method of dealing with Mr Culver—without physical violence

Nothing mattered to Armand except Raine How to help safeguard *her.* He considered what Clifford had written. The man was blatant—abominable—yet there was a grain of truth in what he wrote. Raine would probably not believe what Armand had to tell her—if he did. And if he could prove it, there might be a tragedy and he, Armand, would be responsible. For the moment he had to admit defeat. Perhaps, by retaining Raine's friendship and confidence he might be able to help her more in the future. As for that accusation that he wanted Raine for himself—that also was vaguely true. But he had not begun to imagine himself as a rival to Clifford—or in any way a suitor for her affections.

He returned to his hotel, and was appalled as he looked in a mirror, and saw his swelling face and black eye. He was dining with the Comtesse, Mrs. Oliventt, and Raine tonight. What *possible* excuse could he make for this disfigurement?

6

When Armand was announced by Mrs. Oliventt's Austrian maid, Anna, who showed him into the drawing-room, Raine was alone. The two elder women had not yet finished dressing.

Armand gave only a quick glance around the big room with the low ceiling which was at the very top of the tall block of flats which commanded a view across Knightsbridge and the Park. He had seen the flat once when he had brought Raine home from the Débutantes' Ball. Then the curtains had been drawn, but now at half past seven on this May night, the sun was still shining. He thought the colour scheme of pale green carpet with yel-

length, grey lace, dinner dress, big pinkish pearls in her ears, throat bare, and three rows of pink pearls wound around one slim wrist. The only other touch of colour was the rose between her breasts, and the matching deep pink of her lips and nails. She was always extraordinarily *soignée*, he thought; unusually so for a girl of her age. One of Raine's greatest attractions was her intuitive subtle taste in clothes and that almost unconscious desire to allure which was all part of her unique personality. Well, he told himself wryly, she succeeded very well with *him*. He was utterly allured by her. And one smile made him feel that the bruise over his eye was well worth while.

An assistant in a chemist shop had given Armand some

lotion which had brought the swelling down considerably but in order to avoid being questioned about that eye, he had put on sun-glasses. He apologised for them now as best he could.

'Because of a—slight eye-strain . . .' he mumbled the words as he bent over Raine's hand. Then felt guilty because he lied, and she was so charming, saying that no doubt it was caused by the close work he did in his capacity as an architect.

Accustomed as he had grown to being entertained at Candella by the Comtesse—who was a wonderful hostess and with a genius for saying the right thing at the right moment—he found her granddaughter had inherited a large share of it. She was not always, *then*, like her cold, conventional mother. And tonight she was Adrienne de Chagny all over again—just as the Comtesse must have been in her youth; with those easy graceful manners and swift changes of mood—hovering between laughter and gravity.

Smoking the cigarette which Raine offered him, and drinking the cocktail she had made (iced and delicious), he stood watching and listening to her. They talked about London and 'Coronation fever'. The appalling traffic. The gaiety and grandeur of the great capital which had become so gilded and glorified, so beflagged and bejewelled with its colourful decorations. They talked of the crowds pouring into the country from all parts of the world; of the brilliance, the expectancy, the great hopes of the nation behind it all.

'I am really quite glad to belong to this young Elizabethan age,' declared Raine.

'And I, to be privileged as a Frenchman to see it all through *your* eyes,' said Armand.

Now she laughed merrily.

'*Monsieur*, like a true Frenchman, pays pretty compliments.'

'Not idle ones.'

'Oh, Armand, you'll never make me believe that a man of Gammère's race means half the pretty things he says. I know France too well! I've spent most of my childhood between Mougins and London, and I went to school in Paris, remember'

With a faint smile he sipped his cocktail, and took one of the salted nuts from the cut-glass dish she held out to him.

'Possibly. But I, for one, do not waste words of praise. I repeat—I am privileged to see London through *your* eyes.'

'Well, that's very nice of you, Armand.'

How lightly she said those words, he thought. Balanced on the arm of the sofa with her glass in one slender hand, the mellow evening sunlight slanted through the open windows and heightened the colour of the rose on the grey lace dress to a more vivid red. He remembered the other rose she had worn earlier this afternoon on her collar. Somehow he would ever more connect Raine with roses. But a curious feeling of repugnance overcame him suddenly, at the thought of her in Clifford Culver's arms. Perhaps *he* had crushed that rose at her throat, then the milk-white throat, with his greedy kisses. That big muscular hand that had struck Armand with a boxer's precision, must have caressed Raine's dark, satin-smooth head, and encircled that incredibly small round waist which, this evening, was confined by a grey satin belt. Suddenly Armand's forehead felt damp. He put down his drink and passed a silk handkerchief across his brow. He did not want to think about Clifford and Raine. He was tortured by his own too-vivid imagination.

Raine looked at him with sympathy. He was so very pale, and wearing the dark glasses, he looked quite ill this evening Perhaps he was not very strong. She said:

'Are you comfortable at that hotel? Pity we hadn't another spare room so that you could stay with us'

'You are more than kind,' he said, and tried to regain

s poise and stop thinking about the *other man*. But his hing head and sore eye gave him little chance to do herwise.

He was relieved when Raine's mother came hurrying ı, apologising for being late, and was followed by the Comtesse. Then Anna announced Sir Miles Oliventt, who was an uncle on Raine's father's side. The conversation became general. Armand ranged himself beside the Comtesse and they talked of the glorious old building in France in which they were both so interested.

Mrs. Oliventt vanished again. She liked her parties to be 'just so' and although Anna was an excellent cook, she was temperamental. Also, the woman who came to wash up in the evening and help, had not yet arrived, so there were things for the hostess to do.

Raine gave her great-uncle a drink. She was very fond of him. He was a fine-looking old man with white hair and a monocle. He belonged to the generation which was fast dying out. Sir Miles on his part had a very soft spot for his pretty débutante niece; he had been less fond of her mother. Poor Rose! . . . She was such an excellent creature but seemed to make herself unpopular with everyone. Always sacrificing the human element to the creed of propriety. Too correct . . . too censorious, h thought. But she had been a handsome girl when Micha first married her.

Watching Raine tonight, he decided that he had nev seen the child look more enchanting, and told her so.

'My head will be turned soon, Uncle . . . everybody being so complimentary,' she laughed, and fluffed c the lace flounces of her skirt.

Sir Miles glanced in the direction of the yo Frenchman who was beside the old Comtesse.

'From that quarter, too, I'll be bound.'

'Oh, yes, but as I told him—the flattering Frenchı are not to be believed,' said Raine.

Sir Miles adjusted his monocle.

'Looks a nice young fellow. Decently tailored. Don't care much for Continental types as a rule but it takes all kinds to make a world.'

'That's what I'm always telling Mummy. She likes men who are cut to pattern. Daddy was more Bohemian, wasn't he, Uncle Miles?'

'Ah, well—your father was half Irish, like myself, my dear.'

'And I've got Irish and French blood in me, so no wonder I'm not cut to any particular pattern,' sighed Raine. 'I don't mind telling you, Uncle Miles, it makes life difficult. I wish I were like Cousin Jennifer, who adores being a deb. and always seems to behave just as Aunt Maud wants her to.'

She nodded, looking around almost fearfully, at the mention of that name in this room where her mother had made it taboo and where even her beloved grandmother was loath to hear it spoken. Her eyes filled suddenly with tears which she could not control.

'I do think you are all awful about Clifford. None of you really *know* him.'

'Your mother seems to know quite a lot *about* him, and the one time you introduced him to me I can't say I was impressed.' Sir Miles frowned, glanced at his sherry, then shook his head. 'Not the right type for you, my pet. Conceited sort of chap. Too full of himself and no background.'

Raine clenched her teeth. The tears dried on her lashes. That stubborn fighting spirit which she had inherited from the Irish side, asserted itself.

'You've let me down, Uncle Miles. You sound just like Mummy. True love doesn't reckon with "backgrounds", you know, and because Cliff is terribly handsome, and a bit vain in consequence, and he was not at Eton like you and Daddy—you're against him. He's so marvellous, too!'

'What makes you think so?'

Raine flung back her head and looked up at her great-uncle. He, who kept racing stables, looked down at her and thought: *'She's like one of my thoroughbreds . . spirited . . . taut . . . and get the bit between her teeth and she'd fly, like the wind, out of sight. No holding her. A beautiful thing—but dangerous to be so unaware of her own potentialities.'*

She floundered in her reply to his direct question.

'Oh, I don't know—I can't describe it—but everything makes me think so. Everything that's in me just *knows* that Clifford is right for me. He's vital and . . and . . . oh, one can't always *explain* what attracts one. I just feel *sure*.'

Sir Miles sighed.

'Well, well, my dear, don't do anything in a hurry. Wait and see. At your age, I fell in and out of love a great many times before I found the one I married. Never let your emotions run away with you One can make mistakes, you know This chap *may* be a nicer fellow than [illegible]

[illegible]

could have got Uncle Miles on her side. He was the head of the Olivett family. But the more they all tried to blacken Clifford in her sight, the more convinced she became that they were wrong and that she was right. And the more she chafed against the idea of leaving England and Cliff behind her

The short discourse about Clifford had depressed her and she was subdued during dinner. Armand, who sat beside her, noticed it.

'May I take you to a theatre tomorrow night?' he asked her.

She did not answer for a moment. She had eaten practically nothing of the excellent meal cooked by Anna. Armand noticed that too. Three tall candles burned in the Georgian silver candelabra on the well-appointed table. In that soft light, Raine's face looked indescribably lovely, but full of a sadness which should *not* be there, the young Frenchman thought. And he was disturbed because he knew exactly what caused her melancholy. He was not really surprised when she said in a voice which only he could hear:

'*Thanks* ... it's so nice of you ... but oh, Armand ... do you think we could repeat the Regent's Park affair—providing I can arrange it?'

He sat rigid. His fine sensitive fingers clenched over the embroidered table-napkin spread across his knees. For a moment he had no words with which to answer. He thought:

'Anything but that. *Bon Dieu*, if she could know

where *he* is at this moment and with whom. If I could only tell her! . . .'

But he said nothing. Behind the dark glasses the mixture of pain and anger in his eyes was hidden from her. She repeated her question, in a nervous undertone. He felt impotent to help her yet would have given much to bring the brightness back to her face and to hear her laugh again.

'Please, Armand,' she whispered, pleadingly.

Now he answered brusquely with a question only she could hear:

'*Do you love this man so much?*'

She felt that he had no right to ask that—he, a total stranger. Yet by virtue of the fact that she had drawn him into her confidence and was using him for her own ends she must not be offended. So she relaxed and replied with a single word—a whispered sigh that rose, he thought, from the very depths of her passionate young heart.

'*Yes. . . .*'

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'*Yes. . . .*'

He turned away but managed to say:

'*Bien!* I will do what I can for you . . . but, please be on your guard.'

She drew in her breath sharply. Those were the very ls great-uncle Miles had used. Why should Armand e Rougement give her such a warning? Oh, they were all stupid, prejudiced, merely driving her deeper into the arms of the very man they seemed to mistrust, she thought angrily. Suddenly she gave a derisive laugh.

'I assure you I can take care of myself, Armand,' she said.

Armand was thankful when Mrs. Oliventt rose and the ladies walked out of the dining-room, leaving him and old Sir Miles to their cigars and brandy.

Rose Oliventt, in good mood, tucked an arm through her daughter's and smiled at her.

'Everybody says you're looking very sweet tonight, darling.'

'Thanks, Mum,' said Raine in a disinterested way.

The Comtesse's dark, deep-set eyes glanced with their diamond brightness from her daughter *to* her granddaughter.

'She is a great success. And being very nice to my young Armand, I am glad to see. What were you whis- [illegible]

[illegible] began to rearrange them. She answered her grandmother.

'Oh—*nothing*.'

'I think Armand is a charming boy,' put in Mrs. Oliventt, 'but I hope Raine will not be *too* nice to him.'

Immediately the girl swung round, always on the edge of animosity towards her mother

'Hasn't he been to the right school? Or don't you think an architect's job important enough?'

Mrs Oliventt's blue eyes met her daughter's grey ones coolly. They clashed. The older woman put in mildly:

'Now, now, Raine dear, don't let's start any of that sort of nonsense.'

'Well, isn't that what you meant?' she demanded 'Weren't you hinting that you wouldn't like me to fall for Gammère's architect?'

'Really, Raine ...' began Mrs. Oliventt.

'Come, come,' broke in the Comtesse, tapped her ebony stick on the parquet floor and eyed the two younger women with faint irony in her gaze. 'What is this all about? And why *shouldn't* Raine fall for my Armand? I think it would be very nice.'

'Really, Mother,' said Rose Oliventt in a low, annoyed voice, 'you didn't bring Armand de Rougement into the family circle with any match-making ideas, did you?'

'I would not object. The de Rougements are a fine old family. Armand had a famous father whose name will

live in the history of the last war, and Armand is fast making his. When he has finished on my plans for Candella, he may be offered a much more important job on behalf of the French Government, in connection with some municipal buildings which are going up in Aix-en-Provence.'

Mrs. Oliventt shrugged her shoulders.

'Oh, well . . .' she began.

Raine interrupted, her eyes darting anger.

'I like Armand very much and I shall always try to please both of you, but I do wish I could be left to make my *own* choice of a man. I get absolutely *fed up* with this match-making. Thank *goodness* I shall soon be of age.'

'And then you'll be quite free to do something really stupid,' said her mother coldly.

'No doubt you're referring to Clifford. . . .'

Raine uttered the hated name, trembling with sudden temper. The Comtesse said soothingly:

'*Alors, mes enfants,* let us not spoil this delightful evening. Rose, your dinner was excellent. Raine, *ma petite*, calm down.'

The girl walked to the window and stood with her back to the two older women, staring blindly at the sunlit Park. Tears blotted out the sight of the proud flags that flew from a thousand masts. She heard her mother say:

'Well, if it comes to a choice, I much prefer Armand de Rougement to Clifford Culver and I tell you so plainly.'

'Well, it won't come to a choice,' said Raine in a strangled voice and ran out of the room.

She needed a moment alone to recover her self-control and she felt, too, a frenzied desire to speak to Clifford if only for one moment . . . to hear that lazy, charming voice reassuring her of his love and devotion; reinforce within herself the strength that she must maintain to fight not only her family but her whole world, if she was

to stand steadfast at his side—which she fully intended to do.

Instead of going to her own bedroom, she ran quickly into her mother's. There was a telephone there by the [illegible]

[illegible] at this very moment [illegible] eak all the rules he had made with Raine and telephone the Oliventts' flat. He was curious to know exactly what M. de Rougement [illegible]

She lifted the receiver. When she heard Clifford's voice cautiously asking to speak to Miss Oliventt all her vital love and faith returned in a wild surge of relief. Oh, how *wonderful*! For *him* to be ringing *her* just when she most needed him. She looked upon it as a symbol of the affinity between them, and almost sobbed into the telephone:

'Oh, darling, darling, it's me, Raine, speaking.'

'Raine . . . my sweet . . .' his voice sounded surprised, 'why, *hello*.'

'I'm so thankful you've rung,' she said emotionally, 'I've been feeling awful tonight and I was just going to call you and hope that neither your mother nor aunt would answer.'

'As a matter of fact I'm not ringing from my home,' he admitted, 'I'm speaking from my—er—Club'

'Oh, are you dining alone at your Club? Oh, darling, how dreadful! If only I could be with you. I can't bear to think of you *alone* when I might be with you.'

'Angel!' said Clifford, and was thankful that she could not know that he spoke from a certain small chic restaurant of which he was a member, and where later there would be dancing and a cabaret. Also, that she could not see the girl whom he had just left at the table where they had been dining *à deux*. A specially ordered dinner with champagne. Clifford was doing things well . .

and enjoying it. Lilias looked really rather fascinating tonight in a black, silky off-the-shoulder dress, with aquamarines as blue as her eyes, around her white throat. Expensive stones, given to her by her rich old father. Her wheaten-gold hair was dressed in a new hair style which suited her. Of course she giggled a bit and had none of Raine's elusive charm but she could be good fun and her old man's bank balance was *something*. Clifford, however, was nearer to being seriously in love with Raine than with Lilias. So his conscience about her (what little he had) as well as his curiosity about the Frenchman had led him to make this telephone call.

'I can't speak for more than a moment,' came from Raine breathlessly. 'Mummy may come in at any moment. Why have you rung?'

'To tell you I love you, my sweet.'

'Oh darling—and I love *you* with all my heart and soul. Darling, I'll never change.'

'Sweet!' he said tenderly. 'I wish you weren't going away.'

'The thought of it is *killing* me. I must see you again. I've just asked Armand to take me out tomorrow so that perhaps we could arrange another meeting.'

That made Clifford laugh with devilish humour.

'You've asked *him*. And what does our French friend say to *that*?'

'Oh, I think he'll help—he seems very friendly towards us.'

Inwardly Clifford was chuckling with that unholy mirth which he dared not share with Raine. But what she had said had told him all he wanted to know; Armand had not given him away. No . . . and he wouldn't, reflected Clifford . . . unless he wanted a repetition of this afternoon's violence.

'I don't think we'll let anyone in on our next secret meeting, darling,' he said. 'I'll arrange something, I promise.'

'Let's fix it now,' she said. She could not bear the *thought of the long hours, the long days ahead without* [illegible]

could she get away? *She was forced at length to say goodbye to Clifford without having made an actual* appointment. He said that he was going up to the Midlands tomorrow. It was business that he could not put off (that was genuine) and then came 2nd June . . . and after that . . . France.

'But I'll phone you, or you phone me before you go,' he said and with a quick, 'Good night, heavenly heart, I adore you . . .' he rang off.

Raine returned to the drawing-room to find that her great-uncle and Armand had joined the others. Armand, watching, made his own conjectures. She was so silent, so melancholy for the rest of the evening. Nothing that he could do, personally, or say, brought a smile to her lips. And he, alone, knew why.

7

Raine lay in the warm sun-dried grass, her head on a cushion, fingers laced behind her head and looked through her dark glasses at an incredibly blue sky. The odour of wild thyme, mignonette, and lavender was wafted to her nostrils. The profound silence of the mountains surrounded her; basking in all the glory of a summer day in the Alpes Maritime.

This was the 17th June, in the Coronation year of Queen Elizabeth II of England. And this warm scented spot in the South of France in which Raine lay was the Orangery, beneath the ramparts of the old medieval monastery which had been a possession of the de Chagnys for eight hundred years. The ancestral home which one day Raine would inherit.

Lying here, with the green shade of an old walnut tree shielding her from the powerful sun, the girl felt that she was the only thing alive in the almost uncanny silence and stillness of her surroundings. All the rest of the world seemed to be asleep. It was the hour of siesta—two o'clock. Her grandmother and her mother were in their rooms, stretched on their beds. The old cook—who was the farmer's wife—had gone back to the farm and would come again in time to cook dinner tonight. Hélène, Gammère's personal maid, was probably dozing in her big cool kitchen which had just been repainted and fitted with every modern convenience. Gammère's two wolf-hounds, Peleas and Melisande, were stretched like dead things in the shade of the trees near Raine. The

very house itself seemed to drowse while Raine looked at it.

Candella! How splendid it was, she reflected—this edifice which had first been raised in the twelfth century, built of old stone and little bricks that were weathered and blanched now by the years. The tall narrow windows in the upper storey retained their former antiquity, laced with iron bars against a possible enemy. Downstairs there were bigger windows, put in possibly just before the French revolution when Phillippe, Comte de Chagny, and one-time secretary to Marie-Antoinette, had lost his head at the same time that the beautiful Austrian queen had parted with hers. Candella had then temporarily passed into virtual decay and remained neglected; until 1897 when a de Chagny had married money and the old place had been restored and brought back to some of its former beauty.

Long before that, in the days of the Crusaders, Candella had belonged to the old Abbé de Chagny who had founded an order of monks. Then these solemn walls had echoed with the chanting of the holy brothers; these terraced gardens had been fertile fields, to be tilled and farmed in order to bring money to the Church.

All that remained now to represent the religious house, were the old monks' cells which, until this very year, had been kept closed and never used. The Chapel had become a studio. (There, Armand de Rougement was allowed to work and paint.) The long cloisters, half hidden by rambling vine and bougainvillaea which grew in wild confusion, the Comtesse found too lovely to disturb, and remained half in ruins.

Raine in this, her favourite retreat, faced the back of the building. Behind her were terraces—sloping down to the village of St. Candelle. Beyond the gardens, a mountainous descent as far as the eye could see, led down to Mougins. Beyond that, the blue silk rim of the Mediterranean. At night, one could see the twinkling lights of

Cannes, along the winding coast. On the other side of Candella, climbing upward still higher, was Grasse. Candella stood here in a splendid isolation. The tiny village had only one shop—butcher, baker, grocer, post-office all in one. There was no gas or electricity, and in Candella, no telephone.

As a small child and later as a growing girl, Raine had loved the wonderful unique old place. Now, as she matured, she would have appreciated it even more, but for the present demon of unrest in her soul. A torment of loneliness—of longing for the *man* from whom she had been parted.

Candella had become a prison—beautiful, cruel, inaccessible to Clifford. In London she had been able to telephone him—see him—enjoy some form of contact with him. Here, she was lost to him and he to her. Only two weeks had passed since she had returned by air to Nice with her mother and grandmother, and the Comtesse's big Citroën had met them and brought them here. Only two weeks, but she felt that it was a lifetime, that she had been through an infinity of pain and misery, and even doubt. For since she had arrived at Candella, not once had she heard from Clifford. *Not once.*

She could not understand it. Her mind probed feverishly and futilely for an explanation of his complete silence. Perhaps he was ill. Perhaps he had been in an accident. Or perhaps it was just that he had not written. She knew that to be the most likely explanation. She was mortally hurt and deeply chagrined, for he had promised to send at least one letter every other day. *Why* had he broken that promise? *Why?*

She had managed to meet him once more before they left the flat in Town—without Armand's help. For Armand had been recalled by his firm in Cannes on special business before the Coronation.

So Raine and Clifford had met in the secluded lounge of a quiet hotel where they hoped to be neither seen nor

heard. It was the best he could do, he said, just before his trip to the Midlands. They had held hands and looked into each other's eyes and said all the things that lovers about to be parted could find to say. Again and again, Raine had promised to remain utterly his, and he had sworn that he would work hard and wait for her. And when she had said that nothing that her family could do or say could make her change her mind, he had replied that he, too, would be faithful and that as soon as she was twenty-one he would marry her; then they need never be parted again.

For Raine, that meeting in a hotel lounge where Clifford could not even take her in his arms, and only kiss her hastily and furtively, had been an agony. For the man it had been disturbing, but he had been thankful to put her into a taxi and watch it drive away. Raine made him feel a cur. Much as he wanted her, he was finding the whole thing a bit 'heavy going' and the affair with Lilias Fitzbourne was still quite promising; he was a bit more *personna grata* in her home, too, than in Raine's. However, if Raine could fix things so that her grandmother would in the end accept him, he was quite willing to shelve Lilias and tie himself up to Raine. He must leave it to chance. He liked a good gamble.

But Raine hated gambling in any form. More especially in love. She was true woman, and with all her heart she desired security—the absolute certainty of feeling that she belonged to Clifford and he to her.

At first, when she arrived at Candella, the unwilling prisoner of mother and grandmother, she sulked . . . wept a great deal in secret . . and made no effort to conceal from her family the fact that she was heart-broken.

They let her sulk. Discussing it, the two women decided that it would be best to take no notice of Raine's moods, and hope that being out here right away from the man would gradually have the desired effect and that she would get over the affair. They even encouraged her

to see plenty of Armand. In fact, Armand was the only person to whom Raine cared to talk for any length of time. For she felt that she could be herself with *him*. She had made him her friend and confidant. To him she could speak openly of Clifford. To him she could express her hopes and fears, and she did so without knowing what it cost that young man to listen and still to hold his tongue and say nothing of what he knew.

She sat with him sometimes in the studio when he was painting, and she was to begin today to pose for him, for head and shoulders—the portrait he wanted to do of her. Her mother and grandmother rarely came to the studio which was at the opposite end of the big building from that wing which had been turned into a dwelling. There, Raine found a certain amount of peace and immunity from her 'jailors'. Not that she ever really lost her deep love and admiration for her beautiful old grandmother, but she found it hard to forgive her for the part she played in keeping her away from Clifford.

Why, *why* doesn't Clifford write? she kept asking Armand.

He, hating to see her suffer and well aware that she had lost a lot of weight and that her eyes were pathetically big and sad, could only make non-committal reply. He did not, in truth know the answer. It might be that Clifford had decided to cut the affair and have no more of Raine. It *must* be so, since he sent no reply to any of the letters that she wrote. And Armand knew how many letters *she* wrote. She told him everything.

But even Armand did not know all the facts. Nobody knew them, except Rose Oliventt and her mother; both steeped in a conspiracy—unfair, if well meaning—to put an end to Raine's love-affair with the undesirable Clifford Culver. The only person they had to take into their confidence was old Jean Saville—who owned the shop and post-office in St. Candelle and who had served the de Chagny family for fifty years or more. Like his father

before him, and everybody else in this village where the Comtesse enjoyed an almost feudal dictatorship—he considered her word law. He could not dream of questioning it, nor of betraying her trust, *Madame la Comtesse* had expressed the wish that all letters addressed to Mademoiselle Oliventt should be kept aside and delivered to *her*, *La Comtesse*, in person. Also that all letters addressed by *mademoiselle* to a M. Culver in London were also be be kept and returned to Candella—to the Comtesse. So this was done and the order strictly observed and *mademoiselle* knew nothing.

So the long, hot, summer days went by, and the silver Mediterranean nights, and Raine wept and fretted, and not one single letter from Clifford (and there had been several) reached her. And only one from her to him—actually posted in Cannes by Armand himself—bypassed the Comtesse's network of espionage and reached Clifford in London.

8

Clifford in London....

After his return from the Midlands, Clifford found himself with a great many other people working in a crowded city besieged by sightseers, grappling with a remorseless climate which wavered between hot sunshine, cool winds, and pelting rain. He had managed to get things working amicably again in the factory but his creditors were upon him and he was sorely in need of money—or at least the promise of it.

He was more concerned with appeasing his bank manager and getting himself well installed in the 'right circles' where money was flowing than with carrying on a wildly romantic, unrewarding love-affair with a young girl. Nevertheless, after Raine's departure he wondered why none of the expected letters from her came, and in consequence was piqued. Clifford belonged to that class of man who is first and foremost the hunter and once red lips were lifted for his kissing he was less eager for the kissing.

He had all he could do to 'keep things going' with Lilias Fitzbourne. Despite the fact that he was unpopular with most of the careful matrons of Mayfair, he had managed to inveigle himself into the Fitzbourne household. He could be intelligent and even sympathetic when he chose.

One night at a private dinner-party with the Fitzbournes in one of those beautiful and expensive mansions standing in its own grounds in the Bishop's Avenue,

on the far side of Hampstead Heath—he was quite a success. He had kept off the subject of racing cars or gambling in the Casinos on the Riviera (both, he knew from Lilias, disapproved of by Alec Fitzbourne). The big banker's hobby was salmon fishing. Clifford had *'swotted up' fishing in schoolboy fashion*. . . . He went to that party armed with his new knowledge and airily spoke about this type of 'cast' and that sort of fly, and all the jargon that might be expected from a keen fisherman.

Mr. Fitzbourne took a slightly kinder view of Clifford Culver in consequence, and over their cigars and a glass of port [illegible]

Clifford thanked Mr. Fitzbourne enthusiastically and wondered (*a*) how he could get the money to buy a decent rod and fishing outfit and (*b*) how to get the time off for a trip to Norway When he was alone with Lilias for a moment, later, however, he felt elated when she looked at him with blue, dancing eyes, pressed a flushed pink cheek against his and told him that she was sure 'everything was going to be all right'.

But he went home feeling far from sure It was a good start, but [illegible]

not necessarily accept him as a possible son-in-law. It was aggravating, too, that Lilias was beginning to bore him. She had never really done anything else. Her cheerful *disposition* and blonde good looks were, of course, assets, but the handsome and charming Clifford had had affairs with so many beautiful girls that he had become blasé. He *needed something* really exciting to hold his fancy. And Raine *had been* exciting: especially when she [illegible]

and wrote several letters telling her that he adored her and that as soon as he could get away he would fly over to Nice and meet her in Cannes.

These letters, of course, never reached Raine, but were burnt by her implacable mother. The burning took place in the presence of a less implacable grandmother who never really felt happy about this despotism. She truly loved her granddaughter and deplored the fact that Raine was so unhappy. And, as she told Rose—it was an awful thing to do really; the letters were Raine's property. Rose had an answer ready :

'You know perfectly well, *Maman*, that if we allow Raine to marry that bounder, we shall be responsible for ruining her life, and I ask you . . . do *you* want to see Candella pass into such a person's hands? Or for him to be the father of Raine's children?'

That shot never failed to reach its mark. Adrienne de Chagny immediately gave in and allowed the interception of her granddaughter's letters to continue.

It was a week after the Coronation before that first letter from Raine, posted by Armand, found its way to Clifford's office. Clifford read it. Inordinately vain, he had not liked the thought that Raine might be persuaded to 'drop him'.

His handsome face grew smug and satisfied as he read the three or four flimsy sheets of notepaper written in Raine's rather large untidy writing. She expressed concern that she had not received a single note from him since she arrived at Candella. Then said :

I do nothing but think of you and long for you. Sometimes I think I'm going crazy with nobody to talk to but Gammère and Mummy—and Armand de Rougemont, who comes almost every day, and spends most week-ends here, painting. Without him I think I should have gone mad because I can speak of you to him, Cliff. Oh, my love, my darling, have you forgotten me? No, I don't be-

lieve that There must just be some reason, why you don't write. Please, please write to me I love you so terribly. I always will. Completely and utterly, Your Raine.

Clifford stretched his long legs under the desk and lit a cigarette. It really was very pleasant to be loved so much. He had half a mind to put the Jag on an air-ferry and drive it down to Cannes, this very week-end. London was warm and steamy. Raine described that monastery in the Esterels with such vividness that he would give a lot to see it and enjoy it all, with her. *Damn that fellow, Armand!* What right had *he* to see Raine daily? Then

scared of another bashing to tell Raine the truth. Well, that was okay. All the same, Clifford wished he could go over to France and have another shot at getting in with Raine's family. But he could ill spare the cash or the time to make the journey. Then there was another complication. His old mother had been stricken down suddenly with a fatal malady.

There is good and bad in all men, and in Clifford his best quality was his sincere affection for his mother. He knew that he was 'her blue-eyed boy' and that she worshipped his shadow. He knew, too, that she was dying and although she never asked she liked to see him. The doctor had said it was only a matter of a month or two . . . well, he could hang on until then. And, meantime, continue the pursuit of Lilias. He would have to leave Raine for a bit. But he had no intention of letting her slip from his fingers. He wrote to her there and then:

Can't think why you haven't had my other notes, my darling heart. You know I loathe writing but I've been a good boy and dashed off quite a few superb epistles to

you can't complain, my darling, because you haven't been so prolific yourself. This one I've just received is the first I've had. But just to show you how much I love and miss you, I'll send you a wire, too.

He sent the wire :

Je t'aime. C.C.

Then he left his secretary and clerk to cope with the rest of the day's orders, and drove the Jaguar to Bishop's Avenue to meet Lilias whom he had promised to take to Ascot. He had had to sell out some shares last week in order to carry on with this expensive whirl of gaiety, escorting the débutante Lilias. But he hoped it would pay a handsome dividend.

Neither the letter nor the telegram reached Raine.

The Comtesse, who was in bed with *migraine*, opened the wire which had been brought to her by Hélène in a sealed packet from the *Poste*. Mr. Culver's letters she never read. The whole thing was too distasteful to her. But the wire she examined and it made her indignant. She handed it to Rose.

'*Je t'aime* indeed . . . he profanes my language. He does not really love her or he would leave the poor child alone.'

'I agree,' said Mrs. Oliventt, but her hard face looked suddenly less hard—and she worried. In her fashion she was devoted to Raine. Whatever she did, it was because she thought it best for the girl.

'How long will it be before this dreadful business ends!' said Adrienne de Chagny. 'Really, Raine is so changed—it makes *me* unhappy.'

'We can but hope that if she doesn't hear from him at all she will decide that he doesn't love her any more, and that the whole thing's hopeless; then it will end naturally.'

Adrienne de Chagny lay against her pillows, a handkerchief soaked in eau-de-Cologne on her temples; her eyes shut. In a low voice she said:

'There are moments, my dear Rose, when I wonder if we ought to confess ourselves beaten and let her have the man she wants.'

'Over my dead body,' said Rose Oliventt, her lips tightening again. 'You *know* we are doing what is best for her, *Maman*. Besides, her own father would have loathed Clifford Culver.'

The Comtesse sighed again.

'The trouble is that one can never see why one human being falls for another. Mr. Culver may have hidden virtues. You and I just do not see them, *ma chérie*.'

'He has no virtues—he is just a hateful young fortune-hunter,' said Mrs. Oliventt, nearer to the truth than she really knew; 'but somehow he has got under Raine's skin. One has to admit he is extremely good-looking, and those who know him well say he is an amusing companion.'

'Good looks and good humour are desirable qualities in a man. But ephemeral. I wish for more lasting assets in the man my Raine marries,' murmured the old Comtesse. 'Nobility of soul . . . idealism . . . chivalry . . . kindliness. Armand de Rougemont has all these things,' she added.

Mrs. Oliventt sat by her mother's bed, fanning herself. The scorching afternoon tried her. She said:

'You are still considering *him*.'

'He is madly in love with her. Do you not see it, when they are together?'

Raine's mother shrugged her shoulders.

'Maybe, and of course if you shut young people up together in an isolated spot like this—anything might happen.'

The Comtesse lay silent. The golden stillness of the afternoon was broken by the sudden reverberation of

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The Comtesse lay silent. The golden stillness of the afternoon was broken by the sudden reverberation of

hammers from the distance. She unclosed her eyes and smiled at her daughter.

'I hear the workmen. You must admit, Rose, my Armand is making a wonderful job of the restoration of Candella. And did you not hear what *Monsieur le Maire* said the other night at dinner? Armand's Director considers him to be the most brilliant young architect they have had in the firm since the war.'

'I must admit I like him,' said Mrs. Oliventt. 'But Raine will never look at him while she has got that wretched Clifford on her mind. I know her too well. Stubborn as a little ox.'

'The little ox' was, at this moment, walking down to Jean Saville's shop, followed by the two sleepy wolfhounds. The sun had tanned Raine's face, throat, and shoulders to a rich gold. She had had her dark smooth hair cropped shorter than usual, because of the heat, and looked slender and boyish in her blue linen jeans and check cotton shirt. But her eyes were the eyes of a woman who suffered atrociously. Hélène had just told her that old Jean had left a letter for her grandmother, but none had come for her.

She was growing sick at heart . . . and *frightened*. Something must have happened to Clifford.

Around her lay all the beauty of the languorous south; the mountain-side bejewelled with the *fleurs sauvages* . . tiny gay yellow tulips, and every kind of orchis. The ai[r] was perfumed by the rich yellow Spanish broom. . . . A[s] far as Raine could see, silver waves of olive foliage glis[-]tened in the sunlight. The tall cypresses pointed gravel[y] to the burning blue of the sky.

How it hurt, all this beauty, without *him*. The lon[g] continued silence destroyed her; the *uncertainty*. Som[e]times she even contemplated running away from Ca[n]della and taking the first plane to London. Pride was t[he] only thing that stopped her. Besides she had no mon[ey] of her own . . . her mother paid for her clothes and ga[-]

her a small allowance for her personal use, but it was not enough to buy an air-ticket to London But she might have borrowed it—yes, *borrowed*, even if she had to ask Armand or one of Gammère's many old friends in Mougins who had known her as a *child* . . . had she known Clifford wanted to see her. But he did not write and say so. There was the awful searing doubt in her mind now as to whether he still wanted her at all. And even her own wild emotions would not allow her to throw herself at a man who did not love her any more.

She had decided to send him a telegram—to ask a direct question which he *must answer* . . . or it would indeed be the end.

In Jean Saville's cool dim little shop where the sun never penetrated and which smelled of garlic, shoe-leather, wax polish and roasting coffee . . . smells that used to delight her in the old days when she came to visit Gammère . . . Raine wrote her last desperate appeal:

'Cannot bear this silence what has happened you must answer this or I shall know all is over between us'.

She handed the telegram to old Jean The old man with his steel-rimmed spectacles on the end of his nose, counted the words, took the money and mumbled that he would get it off *'Toute suite'*. She thanked him, never doubting that it would be done, turned and began to walk slowly and wearily home, followed by the wolf-hounds.

She looked up at the noble outline of the great monastic building, and the terraced garden that banked steeply down from the cloisters, and suddenly her eyes blurred. She sent up a voiceless prayer.

'God, please don't let Cliff stop loving me. Don't let anything happen. I couldn't bear it.'

An hour later, Hélène brought her mistress one of those sealed packets from the *Poste*. Adrienne de Chagny,

read the telegram that her granddaughter had just written. A mixture of guilt and triumph glowed in her still beautiful, dark eyes. Slowly she tore the paper into pieces, then sent for Rose and told her that she thought 'the end was in sight'. Clifford would not see or answer this pathetic appeal.

'There is only one worry left . . . what happens when we get back to London, and Raine finds out what we have been doing.'

'I hope,' said Rose Oliventt drily, 'that neither of them will ever find out, because if the affair ends here and now, and Raine thinks she's been let down, she will never see him again. I know. She's like Michael. He was the most generous giver in the world but if he once lost faith, he never forgave the person who destroyed it.'

The old Comtesse moved uncomfortably and reached for her smelling-salts. She only hoped that Raine's anger and resentment would never be directed against *her*.

'Where is the child just now?' she asked uneasily.

'In the studio. For her first sitting for this portrait Armand is doing.'

'That's good,' said the Comtesse, and felt suddenly happier again.

9

In the great vaulted room in the Round Tower which had once been the monks' private chapel, Raine posed for Armand.

[illegible]

in fact been the happiest of his life. His time was mainly divided between the Cannes office and the restorative work on which he was engaged here at Candella. But most of his evenings were spent with the family (at the Comtesse's request), and the long golden week-end as well. So he had seen much of Raine and that to him was bliss; especially as she had been so gentle and friendly since she arrived at Candella. True, that joy was tempered by the fact that the name of Clifford Culver was too often on her lips. And it grieved him to see her sadness and know the reason for it.

Armand's bruised eye had long since healed, but his loathing for the man who had administered the blow remained—never to be forgotten. Still less could he forgive or forget what Clifford was doing to Raine. Yet the young man's mind was in confusion, for it was difficult for him not to be thankful that Clifford seemed to have abandoned the pursuit of Raine. He, Armand, was more deeply in love with her than ever. She had grown inexpressibly dear to him. Ever new was the thrill of seeing her when he came here—that slight, graceful figure—

the wonderful face with those grey, expressive eyes . . . the Raine of so many moods, new and exciting. . . . She had become, in fact, a goddess in his sight. A goddess made for him to adore.

This was the ultimate privilege . . . to be allowed to paint her. He had no great conceit of himself as an artist but every stroke of the brush would be a labour of love. Absorbed, he studied every line and shadow of her beloved face and wished that he were a genius who could immortalise her beauty.

'You really must not look so sad. Try to smile a little,' he said suddenly.

The corners of her lips lifted slightly but she sighed.

'I can't help it if I look sad, Armand. I *am*, and you know it.'

The young man bent over his palette and made pretence of mixing colours, his heart beating fast.

'I know,' he muttered, 'but try not to. . . . I do not want to paint a too-sorrowful portrait of you. Your grandmother would not like it.'

'My grandmother and my mother don't care how sad I look,' said Raine with bitterness, 'otherwise they would not keep me here like a creature in a cage.'

Armand winced.

'Have you heard nothing?' he asked in a low voice.

'Nothing,' she said drearily. '*Sometimes I think he is dead!*'

'No, no—you would have heard; one of your friend would have written to tell you if that were the case.'

She was silent. Pride forbade her to tell Armand th she had actually had a letter from her Cousin Jennif this morning and Jennifer had given her news that mac it quite certain Clifford was still alive. Just an idle par graph:

Mummy and I were with a party at the Café de Pa the other night and we saw Clifford Culver with a par

and the Fitzbournes. You used to be rather keen on him, didn't you? I must say he looks marvellous in tails. He's got such a magnificent figure.

Such a magnificent figure. Those words had made Raine's aching heart throb with her memories of Clifford—of that fine red-gold head . . . those wide strong shoulders . . . those strong hands spanning her waist . . . the leonine, sheer physical splendour that was all Clifford. Designed to make a woman—especially an artist—draw in her breath. And she had loved him and thought he loved her equally well. But he danced with Lilias Fitzbourne in a London night-club and did not bother to answer her letters.

No—Clifford was not dead. Raine was not even jealous of Lilias Fitzbourne Her mind was above petty jealousies. A man, any man—might dance with any girl he chose in the London season. And Clifford Culver, though not popular with most of the mothers, was in great demand by the daughters. Why *shouldn't* he go out to parties? She, Raine, had not expected him to sit down and mope once she left Town. But she *had* expected him to be faithful—to give some sign of continued love—tell her that he waited for her to come back—lived as she did, for November, when she would come-of-age and need ask no man's permission to marry whom she chose.

Armand's dark fervent eyes looked through their thick lashes at the pensive face of his beautiful model. The [illegible] Over windows . . . alone [illegible] light filtered in a prism of a thousand hues. . . . The [illegible] were hung with [illegible] niture save the high-backed carved-oak chair with faded

velvet seat in which Raine was sitting, her head ag
the cushioned back. And an old broken organ, tea
in dust and cobwebs; out of action. It was a roo
emptiness and decay—yet strangely peaceful.
Raine felt her stormy young heart to be more at re
here than in any other room at Candelia.

But she persisted this afternoon in tormenting he
(and without knowing it, Armand) by continued
of Clifford.

'If only I were not *me* . . . Raine Adrienne de C
Olivcntt,' she said, speaking her full name. 'If on
were a little peasant girl on a Provençal farm.'

'What would you do, then?' Armand smiled at he

'Work my way over to England—to London—
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He frowned—he found it irksome to have to liste
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'What is to prevent you working your way back—
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Armand could hardly bring himself to mention th
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hear her answers.

velvet seat in which Raine was sitting, her head against the cushioned back. And an old broken organ, covered in dust and cobwebs; out of action. It was a room of emptiness and decay—yet strangely peaceful. Even Raine felt her stormy young heart to be more at rest in here than in any other room at Candella.

But she persisted this afternoon in tormenting herself (and without knowing it, Armand) by continued talk of Clifford.

'If only I were not *me* .. Raine Adrienne de Chagny Oliventt,' she said, speaking her full name. 'If only I were a little peasant girl on a Provençal farm.'

'What would you do, then?' Armand smiled at her.

'Work my way over to England—to London—as a servant.'

He frowned—he found it irksome to have to listen to the frank and unashamed longing she expressed for Clifford. He said :

'What is to prevent you working your way back—just as you are?'

'Everything. I am controlled by my mother and by Gammère and by the fact that I am only twenty. If I ran away now, they could prevent my marriage.'

'And what if you still insisted on going to—to *him*?' Armand could hardly bring himself to mention the hated name, yet was compelled to ask her the questions and hear her answers.

She said in a low voice :

'Clifford *couldn't* and wouldn't marry me. He said before I left—he would not be responsible for creating trouble in my family while I was still "an infant". Once I am twenty-one—he will take me away.'

Armand shook a paint-brush in the water angrily.

'No,' he thought, 'Mr. Culver would not take her until he could be sure the law was on his side, and that he would have no more to face than a couple of irate women. And once he was sure, too, that he would stand

'*Armand*—why did you do that?'

'It was poor—no good . . . not worthy . . .' he stammered.

'Never mind, Armand. I'll sit for you again tomorrow You may be more in the mood, and I may feel able to smile. I have sent a telegram to Cliff. He is sure to answer it. By this time tomorrow, you will see, I shall be smiling.'

Armand looked at her speechlessly. So! Tomorrow he could paint a smiling Raine . . . because she would have heard from Clifford Culver. She would be happy . . . glowing with her passion and her old fervent belief in the *man. Armand groaned and turned away from the sight* of her . . . asking himself how long he could endure this situation. It was fast growing intolerable

Raine was no longer remembering Armand, nor noticing the pain, the desire that sparkled so fiercely in his eyes. She was engrossed in her thoughts of her lover in London. . . . Her golden, 'Viking' Clifford. With unconscious cruelty she wounded Armand afresh. Going up to him she put a hand through his arm and spoke to him very sweetly:

'I'm so fond of you, Armand. You have been so very good to me. I *know* you'd help if you could. Perhaps you can. Listen—I have a plan. Would you ask Gammère and Mummy if you may drive me into Canne this evening and take me to dinner somewhere They would permit that. They trust you. And I can phone Cliff's home. Then I'll find out how he really is Perhaps I'll [illegible]

Cannes tonight?'

eyes no longer dreamy, but on fire with his own passions. Through clenched teeth he said:

'A thousand lovely things. I would say that I worshipped you . . . that to me, you were moon and sun and stars—all the sweet flowers, all the fragrance and the music of the world, and that . . . oh, that I could not live without you. . . .'

He broke off, scarlet, and shied away from her hand.

'I must go. I must get back to Cannes. I have an engagement,' he added in the harshest voice she had ever heard from Armand.

She stood staring—her eyes full of astonishment but without understanding. Then she burst out laughing.

'Why, Armand—you are a real poet. Some girl will be really lucky to have such sweet things said to her. I congratulate you. . . .' Then she added, naïvely, 'I'm afraid Cliff is much too English—too unpoetical—to write anything approaching *that*!'

Armand was on his feet now, wiping the paint from his fingers with the turpentine-rag. His cheeks were colourless. Her laughter had not been malicious—he knew it. But it hurt him desperately. He could see how far removed he was from the focus of her deepest, most serious thoughts.

He heard her sigh and laugh, then sigh once more.

'How cruel fate is! Why couldn't my Clifford write such things to me? As for not being able to live without me, he seems very able to do so, doesn't he, Armand?'

The young Frenchman made no reply. But suddenly a mist came over his eyes; a mist of thwarted passion and uncontrolled feeling for this slender beautiful creature who did not know that she was his goddess and that he had spoken those words to *her* . . . and that they had been dictated by his ever-increasing burning love.

He rushed to the canvas, took a palette knife and jabbed fiercely at the outline of the beautiful face he had begun to draw, until it was in strips. Raine gave a cry:

'Never mind about the portrait—it was not going to be good,' he said.

'But it was extravagant to destroy the canvas.'

'I have others'

Now she looked at him, then said:

'Clifford's terribly busy, you know. He has a big factory and a lot to do in his office.'

The young architect's lips tightened. He had an unpleasing vision of that very office, and of the red-carpeted floor rising to meet him as he fell. Instinctively he touched the eye that had, although he said nothing about it, never really recovered from that blow. It had set up a neuralgia—sometimes he felt sharp pains behind the eyeball which was tiresome for a man whose work demanded almost exclusively the use of his eyes.

Raine continued

'And I dare say he has social engagements which are keeping him busy, too. A lot of my girl-friends know him—and he's probably taking out beautiful blondes like Lilias Fitzbourne, don't you think?'

She ended with a laugh. But for Armand it held no mirth. He knew that she was trying to be [illegible] make [illegible] he [illegible] sh[illegible] from the heights of pride down to the depths of longing to contact Clifford and have her confidence restored, no matter how deep her humiliation. He knew, also, that deep down she would not tolerate Clifford having a serious affair with another girl.

The sweat gathered on Armand's forehead. He wiped it away on his sleeve; his teeth clenched.

Something must be done. He would not see her go down. She must retain her pride and her dignity. He must do something, *something* to ensure that.

Suddenly she noticed that he was very pale.

'Have you a headache, my poor Armand?' she asked him. 'Your eyes look rather sore.'

He searched in a pocket for his dark glasses and put them on.

'A touch of the sun,' he said abruptly. 'Now I must go home if you will pardon me.'

He gave a stiff little bow and said that he would return at seven o'clock in his small Renault. He would go with her now to the other wing of the monastery and ask for permission to take her out.

She took his arm in a friendly way as they moved from the tall, vaulted studio. They passed through a long, low, stone corridor which smelt of damp and decay for it never got the sun, through a studded oak door, and back into the warmth and beauty, the more modern atmosphere of her grandmother's wing.

Armand was absurdly pleased by that so-confiding way she had of taking his arm, yet her very proximity made him feel almost dizzy with the desire to draw her into his arms—take those perfect, beautifully-cut lips in one long heavenly kiss.

He had to speak—to say something to comfort her—so he muttered :

'Of course it is quite possible that Mr. Culver is too busy for private correspondence. You will, perhaps, get a letter tomorrow . . .'

'Not the sort *you* would have written—I shall always remember those things you said *you* would say. They were so charming. Cliff will have to take lessons from you . . .' she laughed.

'God forbid,' said Armand in such a fierce voice that Raine's arm fell away from his and she stared.

They were mounting the wide oaken stairs to her mother's boudoir. This section of the old monastery had been planned so that the ground floor had been given over entirely to a great dining-room, the kitchens, and a library which contained some of the most valuable books in France. The forty-foot-long drawing-room was on the first floor, and from six tall windows one could see to the

blue infinity of the mountains on one side and away to the rim of the sea on the other.

The whole place was dear and familiar to Raine, but lately she had been so obsessed by her infatuation for Clifford that she had not been able to enjoy Candella But this evening she felt deep down inside her that something was going to happen—something to bring the light and laughter back into her life Her spirits had soared. She even began to tease Armand and call him 'a moody old thing' and tell him not to be 'so cross'.

The wretched Armand now addressed himself to Raine's mother who sat at her escritoire writing a letter. In the most formal of voices he asked if he might take Raine into Cannes to dinner and a cinema. Rose Oliventt turned and looked at the young couple, her brows raised in surprise. She was not displeased but she *was*, in fact, astonished, because since their arrival here, Raine had refused all invitations from any of Gammère's friends.

'If Raine would like to go out—by all means,' she said.

The girl's lashes drooped. Her cheeks had that warm pallor which her mother's critical eye noted and were to her a warning signal that the girl was excited about something.

'You look feverish, Raine,' Mrs Oliventt added. 'You didn't lie in the sun too long this afternoon, did you?'

'No,' Raine said.

'And did the portrait go well?'

Armand put in hastily:

'Not at all. We start afresh tomorrow.'

'Oh, well,' said Mrs. Oliventt vaguely, 'I'll tell Gammère that you will be out tonight. She has a *migraine* and she isn't getting up for dinner She is asleep just now.'

'I'll bath and change and be ready by the time you get back, Armand,' said Raine

He bowed and left her alone with her mother. If he, on his part, was wildly excited by the thought of spend-

an evening alone with Raine, nobody would have
wn it from his quiet exterior. But after he had gone
. Oliventt looked at her daughter sideways and said :
I suppose you realise, don't you, that that young man
ead over heels in love with you?'

'Nonsense, Mummy,' said Raine with a casual laugh;
very young man who comes near me is in love with me
–in your estimation.'

'Ask your grandmother.'

'Oh, Gammère is the same. You two sillies are always
sure that I have an admirer. You don't believe in platonic friendship.'

'Maybe with cause,' said Mrs. Oliventt in an ironic voice.

Said Raine :

'Armand is in love with his work. I don't think he cares for anything else.'

'Why have you suddenly decided to go out with him? Mind you—I'm only too glad—you've been carrying on in a very silly, sulky manner since we got here.'

The good humour left Raine's beautiful young face which had lately grown so much thinner and sharper in outline. Her mother was never tactful with her and this was the sort of remark that put her into a poor humour. But she merely walked out of the room and asked Gammère's maid, Hélène, whom she met in the corridor, to turn on the bath for her. She did not want to quarrel with Mummy this evening. Besides—she felt guilty—knowing perfectly well that the first thing she meant t
do in Cannes tonight was to put a call through to Cli
ford. She only wished that she had gone into Cann
with Armand earlier today and phoned Cliff's off
where she might have stood a better chance of find
him in.

Foolish she might be, to be doing this, but she r
find out once and for all, just *why* he hadn't writte

11

Meanwhile, Armand drove himself through Mougins into Cannes. He lived in a narrow, shabby little house in a quiet street behind the market-place in which he had had a bed-sitting room for the last two years.

He let himself in. His landlady, Madame Tourville, came to meet him. She was a fat motherly soul—a widow [illegible] with no ornament save a huge gold-and-glass ornamental brooch on her collar. Her hair was done in a mountain of sausage-like little curls, dyed black. She had a faint black moustache and little boot-button black eyes. Her shrill voice was to be heard screaming incessantly for Colette, the maid-of-all-work whom she ran off her feet, and who stayed here in virtual slavery exclusively on account of M. Armand. To catch an occasional glimpse of him and to receive a smile morning and evening when she brought him a tray with his food on it, was Colette's reward. He was always so kind and she adored him. Madame Tourville also adored him and did not charge him excessively, although as she said: '*La vie est chère.*' She gave him plenty of good nourishing food and was especially proud and pleased because he did not move from her humble house to better rooms when he had an increase of salary, and his name had appeared in the local newspapers as a prizewinner in a competition for architects, held in the *Midi* some months ago But in her

estimation he worked too hard, and burned the light in his room too late. She was always admonishing him and telling him that he needed a good wife who would cherish him and care for his clothes and his health.

'I shall not marry in order to have a good cook or nurse in the home, *chère Madame*,' he had told her so many times.

To which she would answer with a shrill laugh, wagging a fat forefinger:

'*La, la, M. Armand, toujours l'amour? Hein?*'

And off she would go, chuckling, back to the kitchen to snap Colette's head off. But Colette did not mind because she was happily preparing the tray for M. Armand's meal. This evening, Madame Tourville had news for Armand.

'*Alors*, Monsieur Armand, there is a young lady waiting for you in my *salon*. I tried to tell her that you would be busy when you got home but she insisted on staying.'

'A young lady for me?' Armand ran his fingers through his short, brown, curly hair, perplexed.

Madame bent forward and spoke in a confidential whisper:

'It is the *jeune fille* you used to take out, *Monsieur*; an old friend. That is why I allowed her to stay. I did not think you would be pleased—but what could I do?'

Armand flushed and he looked slightly alarmed. He knew exactly to whom *Madame* referred. There was only 'one young girl' whom he had ever taken out regularly. It must be Yvonne. He had not seen her for six months. Just before Christmas—when he had told her that he felt it best not to see her any more because she was growing too fond of him. He had known with every instinct that she was not right for him; and that he could never ask her to marry him.

He had a terrible scene with poor Yvonne which had made him regret bitterly that he had ever embarked on the affair. It had been that hysterical streak in her which

had always perturbed him and given him warning that he could never find permanent happiness in Yvonne's [illegible]

Yvonne was three years older than Raine. She had the asset of a good figure and marvellous red hair, and the white skin that goes with it. Armand had painted her head and shoulders several times—never very satisfactorily because Yvonne could not sit still for a moment. She was highly excitable and restless, with none of that curious tranquility which allowed Raine to pose like a professional.

Why had Yvonne come to see him? As he walked through Madame Tourville's stuffy little hall which reeked of garlic and frying vegetables—Armand felt irritated rather than flattered by this visit He had not wanted to see Yvonne again It had been terrible to him with his gentle and kindly nature to have her clinging to his knees, begging him not to break with her It had all been made worse by the fact that she was an orphan and had no mother to turn to, little in fact but a bed-ridden grandfather with whom she lived And her job Quite a good job, for she was an assistant in one of the chic hairdressers' *salons* in Cannes.

This evening of all evenings—with Raine so much on his mind—he certainly did not want a 'session' with Yvonne. But as he opened the door of *Madame's* [illegible] and saw the girl, he tried to be polite and to express pleasure.

'How are you, Yvonne?' he asked, and very [illegible] bent over the hand she offered, making pretence of [illegible]ing it with his lips.

'Eh, alors, Armand, comment ça va?' she [illegible]

He said that he was well, hoped that she [illegible] good health, and asked if she would like [illegible]

She shook her head and refused the chair he pushed forward for her.

Armand looked a trifle nervously around *Madame's* private *salon*. It had a vault-like coldness after the heat outside; she kept the shutters almost permanently closed. The room smelt of polish and damp-rot. It was scrupulously clean but the garish blue striped wall-paper was peeling and discoloured. *Madame* was intensely thrifty and never a sou would she spend on having the roof repaired. She always hoped that the summer sun would dry the place and repair the ravages of the winter rains. The little room was crammed with ornate furniture, photographs, and various relics of the late Monsieur Tourville, including a huge photograph of him which hung over the fire-place. Armand fixed his gaze on that grim visage with the waxed moustache and the hollowed cheeks of one who had passed into oblivion after a long-drawn-out illness.

One brief glance at his former girl-friend had shown Armand that Yvonne was astonishingly changed. He used to like her simple way of dressing and the fact that she used very little make-up. But this was an exotic young woman with all the hall-marks of the Parisian shop in which she worked, upon her. An elaborate hair style, a heavy *maquillage*; mascara which made her eyes look unnaturally large. He had never cared for Yvonne's eyes; they were too protuberant and of an insipid blue. And her lipstick was smeared. That was a thing he could not stand; when a woman put on so much lip-rouge that it accentuated the size of her mouth, then became smeared. How different, he thought, from those delicately cut, rose-leaf lips of Raine's.

Knowing Yvonne as well as he did, and how little she could afford to spend, he was struck also by the expensive *ensemble* she was wearing this evening; a white tailored shark-skin suit with an exquisite blouse of *broderie-anglaise* which might have come out of one of those mil-

lionaire's shops on the glittering Croisette. Then his glance went to her left hand and his heart jumped, for he saw the gleam of a wedding-ring. At once he felt vastly relieved. He exclaimed:

'You are married, Yvonne? *Alors*, this is a great surprise. You never let me know and I never saw an announcement . . .'

She kept her gaze on him. That same intent hungry gaze, he thought . . it used to make him feel uncomfortable in the old days. He pitied her then because she was poor and hard-working and so fond of him, but towards the end that particular expression had become repellent. It was as though her nature was like a bottomless pit which would swallow up a man's pity and affection with remorseless avidity and finally beggar him. She said:

'I did not write to you because you told me not to.'

'*Eh bien?*' he said awkwardly.

'And there was no local announcement,' she said, 'for after that day when you broke my heart by telling me that you had finished with me, Armand, I left Cannes and went to Paris'

'You know I did not mean to break your heart, Yvonne. You broke your *own*. When we first started to go out together, it was as friends, and you will remember that when you first told me that you cared for me in a different way, I warned you that it was not the same with me, and it was better we should not continue our friendship'

Her smile now was almost a sneer.

'Oh, quite so, *mon cher* Armand, and looking back I can see that I was entirely to blame. You were always most honest and chivalrous. Nevertheless my heart *did* break'

He felt uncomfortable and glanced impatiently at his wrist-watch.

'I am delighted to see you, Yvonne, but I have a very important appointment and . . .'

'Anxious to get rid of me, eh? Still the same Armand,' she broke in.

'Really, my dear,' he said, his large dark eyes full of distaste, 'you did not come back to see me just in order to embarrass me, did you?'

'No.'

'Besides—you are married—and I presume you are now happy. Perhaps one day I shall have the pleasure of meeting your husband.'

'Pierre is dead,' she said calmly.

Armand felt hot and more uncomfortable than ever.

'So soon? I am deeply sympathetic,' he began.

She interrupted in the same calm voice. It was a sinister calm in Armand's imagination. He had known it, in the past, to precede a storm. And he could see by the way she kept chewing her lower lip that she was agitated; he could feel also that she bore him a grudge for the past. Definitely she had changed, and for the worse, because she had none of the youthful wistfulness left which used to touch him, make him want to be kind to her. This Yvonne was mature and smart, and had a new boldness which he found unattractive. He listened, frowning, while she told him about her short-lived marriage.

She had received an offer to go to Paris and continue with her hairdressing in the *salon* of a certain M. Pierre Thibault, a man much older than herself who had a profitable business in the capital. He had fallen in love with her and married her. Four months later he died in a car accident on the outskirts of Versailles. So, suddenly, Yvonne's fortunes had changed. She had found herself quite a rich widow, for Pierre had an excellent *salon de coiffure* in the Rue de Rivoli. A week ago Yvonne left a manager there, and came down south to her old home to open up a branch in Cannes for the

season. She, who had once been poor and of no account, found it amusing to have money and power here in her native town. She had put her grandfather into a Home for Incurables, she told Armand. She came nearer to him at this point.

'So you see, at twenty-three I am a widow with means —and I can afford to take *you* out to dine and dance at the Ambassadeurs, *mon cher*, if you like to come.'

'It's very good of you and very nice to see you again,' he stammered, 'but . . .'

He broke off. One of her hands flashing with a big diamond ring, touched a ruby-and-diamond clip on the lapel of her white jacket. She gave him a deep, long look and said:

'So the long months we have been separated have not made you love me any more. You haven't missed me? You are not really glad to see me tonight and to know that I am well-off and that I can offer you as much, if not more, than you can offer me?'

His heart sank. The last thing in the world he wanted was to recommence this sort of association with Yvonne. He might well regret the day he had ever started the friendship. Yet at the time it had seemed innocuous enough. Just an ordinary friendship with a pretty girl whom he had met at a local dance. It was unfortunate that it had had to develop the way it did. And more than unfortunate, Armand reflected now, that she had chosen to come back into his life. Yvonne, as Madame Thibault, a rich young widow, seemed in a curious way more formidable than the Yvonne of former days.

He thought it best to be brief—and honest. The pain inflicted through honesty could never be as bad as that which can be caused by lies (how well he knew that, remembering the very case of Clifford Culver and Raine!).

Without preamble, he told Yvonne that much as he appreciated her visit and her offer, their old association could not be revived.

He saw the thwarted look that made an ugly mask her painted face. He realised—without being flattered that Yvonne was still in love with him. She said:

'For old times' sake surely you are not going to cut r right out, Armand.'

'It is best,' he said awkwardly.

She quivered from head to foot, but seemed to ta control of herself. In a voice scarcely above a whisper s said:

'I never thought you could be so cruel. I suppose th is another woman. In fact I know. . . .'

'You know nothing,' he said sharply.

She drew in her breath, pulled a chiffon handkerch from her bag and touched her lips with it.

'Yes, I do. I went to see the girls in the old *salon* t morning. I heard all the gossip. They told me that y go daily to the home of the Comtesse de Chagny, th above Mougins. They say you are interested in her Er lish granddaughter. That, then, is the explanation your conduct towards me.'

Armand was very pale now and exceedingly ang Any affection he had ever had for this girl—or any sy pathy—vanished. He saw that her marriage and l money had had a deteriorating effect on her charac which had never been very steady. He said:

'I detest gossip and will have no part in it, neither v I discuss my private affairs with you. Please go, Yvon

She gave a sudden laugh.

'*Tiens, tiens!* So it is true! You are angry with me cause I have hit on the truth. Ah, I know all ab Mademoiselle Olivent. See, I have even heard l name! She went to the *salon* a week ago to have l hair cut short by Anton, who is an old friend of mi He told me.'

'You must excuse me, Yvonne. I have other things do. Good night,' Armand interrupted in a frozen voi bowed and turning, walked out of the room.

...followed him shrilly:

"This is not the last you will see of me, Armand. I a... not a poor little nobody now to be cast aside. I am goi... to stay in Cannes for the rest of the summer. I shall loo... you up again—*and* your English *demoiselle*, too. I . . ."

The voice was lost to him. He had closed his bedroom door. Looking through the shutters, he watched Yvonne step into a smart grey Citroen saloon and drive herself away.

He felt disgusted and depressed by the whole episode. It had cast a blight over his evening. He did *not* see that he had anything to fear from Yvonne no matter how bitter or malicious she had become. But to have his name linked with Raine by *her*, and in such vulgar fashion, jarred on him. He was sorry that Yvonne had returned to Cannes.

At seven o'clock, however, feeling more cheerful, he was ready to go to Candella. Wearing a light grey suit, and his best white silk shirt, with a carefully chosen dark ...ed tie, he drove out to fetch Raine.

She waited for him—cool and lovely in a short, full, ...rey silk dress which had white polka dots, and was ...athed off the shoulders. She had pearls in her ears ...d around her throat. He had brought her a spray of ...l roses and was delighted when she thanked him and ...ned them immediately against one shoulder. It ...lled him to see her wear his flowers.

...n the Renault, driving to Cannes, she was in a gay ...d although he sensed that some of the gaiety was of ...rvous kind. She was keyed up to excitement because ...oped and believed that she was about to speak to ...rd.

"...e must just pray that he will be in *Pray*, Armand ...e kept saying.

...nodded and wondered if she was not laying her...en to the bitterness of disappointment. She tor... him by letting drop all kinds of remarks which

proved how little he counted with her save as a friend and as an ally. The wretched Yvonne—now Madame Thibault—had no cause to be jealous of *Raine.*

He was such a *wonderful* friend, Raine declared. . . . She was thankful Gammère had introduced him . . . both she and Clifford had cause to be grateful to him . . . it was wonderful to be able to talk about Clifford to him . . . he was so sympathetic. . . . And so on, until Armand's ears burned and his heart beat with slow, painful throbs. His pulses were on fire with longing. She sat there, far too close to him, one bare arm touching his shoulder and the perfume of her hair assailing his nostrils.

They descended the hill and passed Mougins—the little village that stood on the crest like an enchanted medieval town, full of charm with its cobbled streets, narrow, grey stone houses, with their wrought-iron balconies, and the charming fountain in the market-square. Then they drove down again, towards the sea. The blue waters were still sparkling in the rays of the dying sun as they turned round by the station into The Croisette.

At this hour—cooler than the day—every café was crowded with gay smart crowds sitting outside drinking aperitifs. The Casino gardens were brilliant with banked formal beds of flowers. In the harbour one or two magnificent yachts were moored, and outside the Casino itself, gleamed a long row of expensive cars. The *Salle des jeux* were full. Cannes was a noted playground for the rich. But Armand and Raine were no strangers here. And he, in particular, knew his Cannes and exactly where he wanted to take Raine to eat. A small, charming restaurant hidden away in a quiet street where the food and wine were perfect, and where they could sit quietly and talk.

'Afterwards, if you would like to choose a cinema or maybe walk along the sea-front—just tell me what you wish,' he said.

'Thank you. You're so good, Armand. But first let m

And now Raine learned that Clifford's mother had been seriously ill and that he had been rushing madly between business and her sick-bed. For the moment Mrs. Culver had revived and was no longer on the danger list . . . but as Raine heard this, her spirits soared. For surely, she reflected, this was the reason why Cliff hadn't written to her. She knew his devotion to his mother. He had had all he could do—what with her illness and his work, poor darling, she thought.

'Do you happen to know if he has heard from me at all?' she asked hopefully. Miss Culver did not know.

'Where is he now? When do you think I could find him in?'

Then the aunt gave her the crushing rejoinder:

'He is in Norway. Yes . . . on a fishing holiday in Norway.'

'A fishing holiday in Norway,' repeated Raine stupidly. *No, it can't be,* she told herself. *He can't have gone away like that . . . if he had any time to spare he would have flown over here to see me. . . .*

The sweat broke out on the palms of her hands and her heart gave a horrible sick jerk. At which point Clifford's aunt delivered the *coup de grâce* without knowing what she did.

'Cliff is the guest of some people named Fitzbourne I don't know when he will be back, but I'll let him kno you rang. Your name is . . .?'

'No,' interrupted Raine in a hoarse little voice. 'N please don't say that I rang. Thank you and good-bye.'

She put down the receiver. For a moment everythi seemed to be swimming around her. Her thoughts we chaotic. Clifford was away in Norway *fishing* with t Fitzbournes. Lilias was with him of course. *Lilias!* . . .

Raine could hardly stand—her knees were trembl so violently—she felt so sick. Through the glass door the telephone box, thankfully, she saw Armand, walk towards her with an anxious face.

12

Raine had never been so glad to see anybody as she was to see Armand at that moment. He was kind and gentle and her friend. She stumbled out of the telephone box into his arms. Aghast, he held her for an instant of mingled bliss and pain. Bliss to feel the nearness and dearness of her, pain because of *her* pain. He had known, before she spoke, that her worst fears had been realised and that the call to London had brought her none of the reassurance she had needed. He looked down at her white, set young face. The look of bewilderment and misery in her eyes was like the look of a hurt child that asks what it has done to be so hurt.

'Oh, Armand,' she said, '*Armand!*'

'What is it, my dear?' he asked the words adding in his own language: '*Pauvre enfant . . . ma pauvre petite . . .* what is it?'

She realised suddenly that they were not alone, but in the crowded brilliantly lit lounge of one of the smartest hotels in Cannes. A tall, slim creature who looked like a mannequin, wearing a white evening dress, her corsage glittering with rhinestones—her hair dressed high, set off by a spanish comb, came along on the arm of a good-looking young man. He wore a dark blue dinner-jacket. They were laughing and talking in Spanish. The sound of the laughter, of the high-pitched voices chattering at such a rate, had the effect of calming Raine down. With a mental jerk she pulled herself together, drew a hand across her eyes, and said in a bright, hard, little voice:

'Come on, Armand, let's get out of here.'

'But, Raine . . .'

'Let's get out,' she interrupted him. Her fingers clutched his arm fiercely. He sensed that she was making a strenuous effort to control herself. He said no more but walked with her out of the hotel.

For a moment they stood on the kerb and watched a long line of sleek cars passing up and down The Croisette. The sun had set. The first stars winked from a violet blue sky. The sea was almost purple and the flood-lighting in the Casino gardens made the flowers look fantastic, artificial, as though painted by a crude artist. A crowd strolled through those gardens on this warm summer's night. The atmosphere was electric, with all the gaiety and elegance of the Riviera.

But a very unhappy young English girl stood clinging to Armand's arm. In a choked voice, Raine said:

'Where can we go?'

'Do you want me to take you back to Candella or shall we have dinner as arranged?'

'Don't take me back to Candella—*please*. I couldn't bear it.'

'Then we'll have the meal and perhaps you'll feel better after it,' he said, his heart aching for her.

She nodded dumbly. The tears had begun to well into her eyes and blurred the exquisite evening sky and the dark violet of the sea. She hated all these cars and people. She hated the very stars. And most of all she felt that she hated Clifford because he had broken faith with her. But that very hatred was bred from love. And it was not like Raine to love lightly and as lightly dispose of it. Not Raine to be able to fight all the emotions that she had been feeling for months for this man, with ordinary weapons of anger or pride. They were not strong enough. Passion was still stronger, and hate only secondary to love.

Raine knew that she still wanted Clifford. How ghas

she thought, as she walked like a blind person guided by Armand along one of the back streets, to the *Moulin D'Or* Restaurant.

How ghastly that she should still love and want a man who did not even bother to answer her passionate appeals, although she had left him on the understanding that one day they would become man and wife. How ghastly, still to feel terrible desire for a man who had gone, idly, on a trip to Norway as the guest of a wealthy man whose daughter attracted him; who had left her, his old love, 'cold'. And his last words had been to tell her that he was too busy to take a holiday, otherwise he would fly to Nice.

'In order to see you, heavenly heart,' he had whispered, when they were together.

'Heavenly heart.' She used to laugh at that extravagant name, yet loved it because it had seemed so full of tenderness and feeling. So she had imagined! What a hypocrite he must have been! And what a fool she had been to have believed in him.

She came out of a virtual stupor of misery to find herself sitting in the little restaurant which was unknown to her, at a small table by the window, whilst the waiter laid an enormous menu adorned by a hand-painted, golden windmill before her. She was glad there were not many other people here as yet. The chic world on the Riviera rarely dined until much later. This was a charming place; the walls hung with oil paintings done by local artists. There were exquisite flowers, and lighted candles on all the tables. At one end of the room stood a side-table laden with tempting cold dishes. Red lobsters on silver platters; crisp green salads. Bayonne hams, wonderful-looking cheeses. The proprietor greeted Armand with a bow, and suggested that *Mademoiselle* should try the *plat du jour*, and recommended a very special wine to go with it.

'I don't think I can eat anything; I feel sick,' Raine

whispered to Armand. But his hand went out, covered hers, and his eyes warm with pity and anxiety, pleaded with her.

'Try, *chérie*, please.'

She did try. She begged him to order any meal that he fancied, and agreed to drink any wine the proprietor suggested. But she was shivering although the night was so hot and scarcely a breath of wind came through the open windows. She shut her eyes and drew a long, long breath.

'Well, I suppose it is all over,' she said.

Armand's heart jolted. The colour flamed into his face.

'Who answered your call?' he asked her, and sat back and lit a cigarette while they waited for the iced melon which was to start the meal.

She told him. Everything that Clifford's aunt had said. He set his teeth, loathing the man even more, but, of course, he was not surprised. *He* knew all about Clifford's affair with Lilias Fitzbourne! But he had not imagined that the Englishman would be quite so brazen as to drop Raine like a discarded glove, walk out of her life in silence, and go abroad in Lilias Fitzbourne's company. How atrocious of him! Raine ended:

'It can't be anything but over, can it, Armand? He obviously doesn't care about me any more. But I don't understand. *I don't.* If only I could tell you all the things he said before I left London....'

'Don't, *please*,' said Armand under his breath.

She gave an unhappy laugh.

'I've read about this sort of thing, and once I had a friend whose fiancé jilted her. I used to think she was rather stupid not to have realised he was the type to let her down. But I didn't realise about Cliff, did I? I thought he was different. A sportsman above all things.'

'To be good at sport—to drive a car in the Monte Carlo Rally for instance—does not necessarily mean that a man has integrity or virtue,' said Armand grimly.

'But I *thought* he was different,' she persisted, twisting

sure.' ... and I was sure that he loved me—

Armand forced himself to try and comfort her.

'Of course, going to Norway to fish does not prove he no longer loves you, Raine.'

'No. But it as good as proves it. I'm not blind and stupid any more. I am trying to see things as they are. Even if Cliff isn't attracted by Lilias, he is indifferent to *me*. It's not only the going away with Lilias and her father, it's this complete *silence*—his not answering *one* of my letters. Obviously he has stopped loving me and is too much of a coward to tell me so.'

'I'm desperately sorry,' said Armand. 'I wish to God, for your sake, it could have been otherwise.'

'Don't be too nice to me or I shall cry.'

Armand was thankful that wine was now being poured out for them.

'Taste this, please . . .' he begged Raine.

'Shall I take to drink?' she laughed and sipped some of the golden wine, but the laugh had such an unhappy sound that it did not make Armand believe that she felt better, neither did her cynical remark amuse him.

'Oh, my dear,' he said, 'don't let this hit you too hard. And don't jump to conclusions. Wait till you see Monsieur Clifford again. He may have some explanation . . .'

'I shan't want to hear it,' she broke in. Pride was making her lift up her head again. An unusual flush stained her high cheek-bones. Her eyes glittered. 'I shall never see Clifford again. One must face facts, Armand. There is no excuse for him not having written to me, even if he changed his mind. He could have explained—that would have been the decent thing to do. But to leave me in this state of mind all these weeks was unpardonable.'

It was that Armand had to agree. He made no further attempt to uphold Clifford Culver even for Raine's sake. But now, being human, he thought of himself and his

immense and overwhelming love for her. Once more his hand folded over hers. He murmured :

'Try to forget him. Oh, my dear, my dear, if only I could help!'

She dragged her thoughts from Clifford and looked at the young man beside her. Coming out of her daze of misery, she grew suddenly conscious of how Armand must feel. At the same time, she remembered her mother's words—the suggestion that Armand was in love with her. At the time Raine had repudiated it. Without vanity now she considered the fact that *he was* in love with her. He might well be . . . and certainly no man on earth could be kinder or sweeter, she thought. Poor Armand! She did not want him to be in love . . . she did not want anything to spoil their wonderful friendship. And the last thing she wished was for him to suffer the pangs of an unrequited passion in the way that *she* was suffering. Gently she drew her fingers away from his. At that moment the waiter served the first course. Because Armand was taking so much trouble, and spending so much money on this meal, she tried to interest herself in it.

'The food is delicious and I love the *décor* in here—I must bring Gammère and Mummy . . .' she began to talk as though nothing was the matter. Armand took his cue from her. She was being brave and he knew it. He, too, talked at random. But the time came at the end of the meal when they were lingering over coffee, and the name, Clifford, came up again. Raine said :

'I don't know whether I am going to be able to stand living at Candella in my present state of mind. There is too much time for thinking—so little to do. I think I shall tell Mummy I want to go back to London, and if I promise her that I am no longer interested in Clifford she'll take me.'

'If she believes you,' said Armand drily.

'*You* believe me, don't you?'

'No,' he said gently but definitely.

She looked into those wise, deep brown eyes. He saw her lips quiver.

'You know too much—you see things that others don't—and oh, you are right, Armand! Of *course* I'm still interested in him. One can't stop loving somebody in a moment, especially not when you've been so close to them, when you've made them your life. Cliff has been like my life. Oh, *Armand*! ..'

'*Chérie*,' he interrupted, 'I beg you not to distress yourself further. And I beg you not to return to London. That gay artificial life—all the parties and dances and so on, cannot bring you peace of mind. But Candella is a place of peace. Give it a chance—stay awhile with us. Don't go away, please, Raine.'

She looked up at him—all woman now, hurt, needing balm for her pain; her hungry heart crying out.

'Would you miss me?'

That was cruel of her and she regretted it, for immediately she realised from the response in his eyes, what she had done. He answered huskily:

[illegible] it down.

'Hadn't we better go?'

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'I would miss you so much that I hardly know how I would readjust my own life.'

She touched her lips with her table-napkin then flung [i]t down.

'Hadn't we better go?'

He ignored this. He could not now resist the impulse to [te]ll her a little of what he, personally, was feeling.

'*Je t'adore*. With all the breath in my body, Raine, I [ad]ore you,' he said in a low voice.

Her breath quickened but the tears that filled her eyes [wer]e neither of happiness nor satisfaction—only of sor[row] because she, too, must inflict pain. She reproached [hers]elf for allowing this crisis to develop. As if there [hadn']t been enough trouble for one evening, she tho[ught mis]erably.

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'Have I not told you that you mustn't love Clifford Culver? Does love listen to "musts" or "do's" or "don'ts"? Ah, no, *ma chérie*, it is much more difficult than that; much more involved. The human heart plays truant. I have let mine run away with me. It has been yours since the first time I set eyes on you. Now—*now*, you know.'

Her lashes drooped. She could hardly bear to see the adoration in those dark, burning eyes which she had once described to herself as eyes that might well have belonged to a Knight of the Crusades. Armand was so idealistic and sweet. And for some woman, what a wonderful lover he would make! But not for her. She sat there cold and unresponsive because she was still in love with another man. Still remembering Clifford's last kiss, Clifford's fingers threading her hair and Clifford's voice telling her that there could never be any other girl in the world for him except his 'heavenly heart'. She heard Armand's voice, a little ragged.

'Have I offended you? Have I been a fool to tell you of my love, tonight of all nights, when you have had this shock, this grief? Forgive me, *ma douce chérie*. It was madness and I know it.'

Now she looked at him.

'What can I do, Armand?'

'Nothing. Just forgive me,' and he pulled her hand to ps and kissed it. It was a burning kiss of intense on, but she found it spiritually rather than physically turbing in her present mood. Because Clifford had hurt er with dishonesty she was determined to be honest with Armand.

'I wish I could love you in return,' she said. 'I wish I had never met Clifford and that I had fallen in love with you, instead. Then we might have been happy, both of us. But it isn't so—and in the circumstances it might be better for me to go back to England and not see you any more.'

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He felt his whole body grow taut with fear.

'Raine, I beg of you—do not do that. I think it would kill me if you left Candella now,' he said under his breath.

'But, Armand . . .'

'No, *please*—do not go! Give me a chance to see more of you. To go on being at your side. It means so much to me. I realise that you do not love me and that you never will, but just now when you told me that Clifford was your life, I understood because *you* have become *mine*. One day you will have to leave France and return to London, but not yet please. Stay and let me be your friend—only your friend. Let me paint your portrait. Give me that joy. With all my heart, I ask this of you, Raine.'

She sighed. She felt tired and confused and very unhappy. She thought a moment of what it would be like in the flat in London, living alone with her mother. Of the Coronation Balls and all the wonderful things Jennifer, her cousin, was doing and which she, Raine, could do if she wanted. A Command Performance at Covent Garden, Trooping the Colour, Ascot, then Wimbledon . . . tennis . . . the giddy social round of the Mayfair circle. She had never really cared for it. In her heart of hearts she adored Candella and the quiet, beautiful life in the mountains. And if she went back to Town—she would be bound to see Clifford and that would hurt horribly. No . . . Armand was right. She might do better to stay with Gammère a while longer—until she had found an anodyne for her pain and built an armour of defence which she could wear when next she came face to face with *him*. But, she told herself, she must think also of Armand. Mummy had been so right about him.

'Are you sure it won't bring you unhappiness if I stay—if you go on seeing me?' at length she asked.

With his whole soul in his fervent eyes, Armand answered .

'It will be for my greatest happiness. I beg your for-giveness for ever telling you of my love. I won't speak of it again. That is a promise.'

She was deeply touched. Impulsively she gave him her hand again and as he bent over it, she said:

'Thank you, Armand. You are truly wonderful to me. I will stay. I'll get over this business about Clifford without running away from Candella. Or trying to run away from myself. And I'll write to Clifford, I'll tell him that we are in agreement because my feelings, too, have changed, and that I am glad he is enjoying life with Lilias because I—I am having a wonderful time . . . with Armand de Rougemont.'

She added that name, stammering, with laughter tha broke, and with eyes brimming with tears. The young Frenchman felt his heart knock against his ribs, it beat so hard and so fast. He knew that what she said was o little significance yet it made him almost drunk with joy. Scarcely knowing what he did, he paid the bill and fol-lowed her out of the restaurant.

13

The July morning was hot. Quite early in the morning Raine opened her shutters and let the golden sunlight pour upon her in a warm cascade. Soon those shutters must be closed again to keep out the intense summer heat, but for the moment she gloried in it, stretching slim, bare arms above her head Her whole body was gloriously tanned and this morning she was feeling well. Last night she had slept better than usual. Her nervous system was improving daily and she was glad that she had not given way to those first wild feelings of pain and grief, and run away from Candella. Glad that she had listened to Armand's appeal to her to stay here with her grandmother.

For a moment Raine looked through a heat-mist down at Mougins, sitting on the crest of a hill—proud and ancient—rising out of that mist, like the illustration of a fairy-tale. Down below, old Bertil the gardener, was spraying the vines with powdered sulphur and watching the torrents of water that poured at this hour on to the vegetable- and flower-beds upon all the terraces. This artificial irrigation was a constant source of joy to the old man who had lived at Candella in days when every drop of water had to be carried in a bucket from the village pump.

Just below Raine's bedroom window, long beds of lavender and pink geraniums sent up a sweet pungent odour. The peaches were going to be good this year, she noted. Gammère had pointed out yesterday how beau

She thought quite tenderly about Armand. He had been so very sweet to her and, in her opinion, remarkably chivalrous. For he had kept his word implicitly about maintaining a friendly attitude, despite the fact that he was in love with her. Just occasionally those fine dark eyes of his rested upon her with an adoration that burned like a steady flame. But she did not notice it. And never by word or action had he expressed it again. She had grown used to his company and interested in his work, and she shared Gammère's belief that he had a future in front of him as a painter. He was going to paint Gammère herself, as soon as he had time.

Later in the morning, Armand arrived with his car, punctual to the minute. He was more darkly tanned than Raine and looked, she thought, rather attractive in his spotless white shirt and shorts. He had slim, straight, brown legs, like a boy's, and those rough brown curls always gave him an air of youthfulness, yet always there was still a pang in her heart for the bright red-gold of Clifford's hair; the staggering height and strength of Clifford. The sheer masculinity which had always attracted her so vitally. Perhaps because she herself, was so essentially fragile and feminine. Perhaps because of the definite way he used to have of dealing with her, which had been intriguing in contrast to her own dreaminess and reserve. But Armand might have been her brother. Indeed, she felt often nowadays, that she was as a sister would have been to him. Passionless, fond, secure in his company. He never did anything to jar her nerves or give her an instant's doubt as to his essential trustworthiness. Yet—woman-like at times—she would fix that velvet, unconsciously seductive gaze of hers upon him, wondering if he would ever again forget to be a brother . . . if his single moment of passionate desire for her had passed into total obscurity? Raine did not know . . . and she was by no means always sure of herself. She was sure only of one thing, that it was better she should ne[illegible]

Clifford Culver again because she was too faithful by nature, and if she saw him—she feared she must love him again.

If Armand felt most unbrotherly when she took her place beside him in the car on that brilliant morning—he certainly did not betray the fact. He smiled and joked as he put the picnic basket Hélène handed him into the back of the car. But he had given one ravished glance at the girl and found her particularly enchanting today. Her slim brownness was set off by a dirndl skirt of lavender and white cotton, worn with a white embroidered cotton blouse which slipped off each smooth, tanned shoulder. There were gipsy gold ear-rings in her ears, a gold choker around the long, slender neck, and a peasant straw hat, tied under her chin with lavender ribbons.

'One day I must paint you like this and in that hat,' he said quite calmly, although his heart was thudding.

'I wonder you aren't tired of painting me,' she murmured.

'I never shall be. You're such a good model—you sit so still,' he said.

But even as he said the words he thought of that other model who used often to pose for him: *Yvonne*—now Madame Thibault—the one who could never sit still. It was unfortunate that he had to spoil this heavenly morning by remembering Yvonne. But he had received a note from her just before he set out for St. Candell.

I must see you again, she had written, *please contact me at my apartment. If you do not, I shall call at your office. If you refuse to see me there, I shall pay a visit to Candella. I understand that the Comtesse de Chagny never refuses to show visitors over the monastery and that I stand a very good chance of seeing you there.*

The threat contained in those words had been plain for him to see, and significant. Yvonne was being mali-

cious. She could also be a formidable enemy. He had come away after tearing up that note, feeling decidedly unhappy about it. He had nothing whatsoever with which to reproach himself concerning Yvonne—but he did not want to have to explain her presence to the Comtesse—nor to Raine if Yvonne ever came to Gandelly. And he knew her—she had a colossal nerve. Her new status in Cannes had made her positively impudent.

To avoid unpleasantness in the house of his patroness, he had been forced to ring Yvonne's apartment and tell her he would call in and see her later this evening.

'I must settle her once and for all,' he had decided.

But how a man 'settles' an old love that has turned to scorn and hatred (for it must be hatred and not love that was making her pursue him like this) he did not know.

However, he put away the thought of Yvonne—determined to enjoy his holiday with his dear and lovely Raine.

It had brought him much delight and satisfaction lately to watch her winning her fight with herself. To see the lustre coming back into her eyes, as she regained her ability to smile. The portrait had not been a sad one after all, but with just a lift at the corners of those perfect lips. The face of a Raine who might break at any moment into the most dazzling of smiles.

Because he loved her so much and wanted so much to keep her beside him, he had tried to conquer his own unceasing longing to make love to her.

This morning, for the first time, he wondered if he had been mistaken in imagining that there could never be any hope for him, and that she would never put Clifford out of her mind. For was it by accident that she leaned closer than usual to him in the car and said one or two especially nice things to him? Both things were:

'I've been looking forward to this quiet ... with you, Armand.'

He answered at random, [illegible]

at her and slowed down the car. Then her grey eyes looked back into his quite charmingly and sent the blood mounting to his head. He thought:

'*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* it is all I can do not to stop the car altogether and take her in my arms. And if I kissed her I wonder, *would she be angry . . .?*'

But he dared not stop the car, nor try to kiss her. He drove on, nevertheless with a wild hope surging within him, and a wild prayer that he might be given the chance one day to touch her deeper emotions; to turn friendship into something more.

He might have been very much less hopeful and happy could he have known that on that precise morning, and at that precise moment, Clifford Culver in London sent his secretary forth to book him a seat on a plane to Nice.

Clifford was at this time of his life a trifle *bouleversé*. A week ago his mother had died. The first and only tears Clifford had ever shed, he shed at her graveside, then turned his face on real grief and decent feeling, and in a most mercenary and cold-blooded fashion set himself out to revise his future fortune.

The death of old Mrs. Culver had left him with a little more capital . . . enough to pay off some of his more pressing debts. His old aunt had gone to Scotland and the maisonette in Regent's Park was being disposed of. Clifford had taken for himself a small bachelor flat in Shepherd's Market. Things at the factory were not doing too badly but it was still obvious to Clifford that he ought to try and marry money—and quickly.

Now, the affair with Lilias was not going as smoothly as he had hoped for. There was to be no speedy settlement *there*, which to his chagrin, he had discovered as soon as he returned from the Norwegian fishing holiday.

Lilias was just as crazy about him as ever and although at times she bored him because she was so 'easy' and ebullient, he would have married her with her father's permission. But that permission, Mr. Fitzbourne had no

been prepared to give. When the [illegible]

[illegible] Clifford was very [illegible] and irritating to his egotism) but he insisted on a year's delay before his daughter and heiress should be allowed to enter even into an engagement.

It would be something—if he could pull it off in a year's time. But not soon enough. He would prefer to find something equally lucrative a little more quickly. So—back came the thought of Raine. He still thought of her and wanted her. Even more so, now that she had piqued him by her sudden dismissal of him from her life. How dared that little [illegible] in love with him, [illegible] and answer none [illegible] asked himself.

Then, during his last talk with his old aunt, she had let fall the news that some weeks ago a girl had telephoned to him from Cannes. Raine, of course. It could be none other. Now why had she bothered to call him from Cannes, if she was not still interested? Could it be possible that she had dropped him only because she was jealous of Lilias? Yet, he thought he had circumvented that by all the pretty-pretty things he had said in his many letters, and even telegrams, to Raine.

He was smitten suddenly with the wish to see her, to find things out for himself. And with that legacy from his mother behind him, he could afford now to take the time off and pay a brief visit to the South of France.

His secretary returned with the news that she could get him a seat on the plane to Nice that same afternoon if he wanted it. He did want it, and the seat was booked.

14

In the glittering blue sea at Juan les Pins, Raine lay on her back lazily threshing the water with both arms, her eyes closed to the hot sun. She felt relaxed and content. She could hear the sound of music drifting from the shore and voices of children screaming delightedly somewhere on the beach, and occasionally the voice of Armand who was somewhere near her. He was a strong swimmer and ventured farther out than herself.

'Sure you are all right?' he kept asking her anxiously, as if he feared that any moment she might sink and drown in front of him.

'Quite all right!' she sang back and laughed. Armand was so funny at times; quite maternal—if one could use such a word she thought—in his solicitude for her.

Suddenly her laughter was edged with sadness, and she felt discontented. *Why*, even in this enchanted hour, must she remember *him*? Clifford, who used so often to talk about bringing her to this very place for their honeymoon, to swim here in these sparkling waters. Oh, there was nothing they had not discussed about what they would do together when they married. How was it possible that he could have forgotten her?

Abruptly Raine turned over in the water and began to swim back to the shore. Armand saw her and immediately followed. He shook the salt-drops from his eyes and smoothed back his roughened hair. His fond gaze followed the girl's figure, so perfect in the revealing white swim-suit. She was small and exquisite, like a Tanagra statue, he thought. She peeled off her rubber cap and

began to brush her dark hair vigorously. Then they side by side, on the sands which were warm and lightful. Both put on dark glasses. In a few moments hot summer sun had dried them Then Armand adv Raine to move under the shade of a striped umbrella

'You must not burn,' he warned her

'You're as bad as my mother,' she giggled a little a reached out a hand for the picnic basket, adding: 'Le have our lunch, shall we?'

'I refuse to be your "mother",' he said with moc solemnity and grimaced. They laughed together. It wa the happiest, most carefree hour Raine had spent sinc the days before her deep disappointment over Clifford and if the niggling voice of regret murmured insidiously within her, she deafened herself to it now. She enjoyed being with Armand as they ate their picnic of ham, hard-boiled eggs, salad, and crisp rolls and butter. With it they drank *vin du pays*—toasting each other. Later, Raine lay with her head on a cushion, and nibbled at a peach that Armand peeled for her. Leaning on one elbow, he looked down at the loveliness of her face and thought that she was like a child now, with golden grains of sand sticking to her warm face, which had the glow of an apricot. She had reddened her lips again. They were like ripe cherries, he thought, asking for kisses. She was fresh and enchanting and he could not control the violent throbbing of his heart. At last, as though it was too much for him, he burst out:

'Oh, Raine, *Raine*!'

She gave him a sidelong and essentially feminine look.

'What is it?'

'Do you know the words of that silly verse'—his voice was a little hoarse and unsteady—"*Quand je te vois—tu me fais peur*..."'

She translated the words into English, dreamily.

'*When I look at you—you frighten me.*'

She began to laugh and dug a little hole for her peach

stone, buried it and pounded the sand over the small grave.

'Silly! Throw me that magazine. I must look at some pictures. I'm so hot, I don't think I'll bathe again till later.'

Armand set his teeth. It was a subtle dismissal—a wordless reminder that such remarks from him were forbidden. He accepted the rebuke and picked up the English *Tatler* which he handed to her. It had only arrived at Candella this morning. Raine flipped idly through the pages. Suddenly Armand saw her sit up, muscles tautening, her whole face changing from careless gaiety to a mask of pain. He knew, before she showed it to him, that she had seen a photograph of Clifford.

He stared down at the picture; it was half blurred by a mist of rage—a rage for which he had no words. Yes! there he was, the handsome golden man with his insolent smile. Sitting at a table in the Café de Paris beside a fair-haired girl. That same girl whom Armand had seen on the staircase leading up to Culver's office. Underneath were the words:

Miss Lilias Fitzbourne and Mr. Clifford Culver enjoying the Noel Coward cabaret, in a party given for Miss Fitzbourne's twentieth birthday.

'Well—what do you expect me to say?' Armand demanded roughly.

Raine shrugged her shoulders.

At first glance, Clifford's photograph had given her infinite pain, followed by a blinding jealousy that she had never known before. It humiliated her. She used to pride herself that she was not the jealous kind and that she could be tolerant of man's failings. But this jealousy was born of long weeks of suffering and resentment. How could he sit there . . . laughing like that in the way she so well remembered beside that stupid Lilias (pretty

Lilias, in one of her débutante misty crinoline gowns, and flowers in her hair). She was looking at Clifford with open admiration. *How could he . . .* when he had had all those letters from her, Raine; *full of love and pleading? Oh, where was her pride, her old belief in life and love? How could she go on like this? One day, soon, her* mother would insist upon her returning to their London home. She could not forever hide in Candella. How could she go to parties and restaurants and meet *him*? Perhaps he was serious about Lilias and meant to marry her, in which case what a little fool she, Raine, would look in front of all the others in her circle! And how awful if *Mummy was given the chance to pity her—that* would be the end.

With sudden violent feeling, Raine flung the *Tatler* across the sand—then turned and buried her face on her curved arm.

To witness so much emotion and know it was for that *cochon* was a spectacle Armand de Rougement could not endure. Once more he lost control, put out a hand and laid it on Raine's head, his fingers feverishly caressing the dark, damp silk of the tendrils curling at the nape of the slender neck.

'Oh, Raine, *mon cœur* . . . my beloved Raine . . . do not upset yourself all over again!' he begged her.

She turned and, with one cheek against her arm, looked up at him. He could see her tears washing the little grains of sand down that one smooth cheek visible to him. *The sight tortured him.*

'For the love of God—*do not suffer any more over the* man,' he added hoarsely.

In a veritable frenzy she answered:

'Why, why must I feel like this . . . I don't really love him any more, I don't, *Armand. I* [illegible]

'Tant mieux!' So much the better.

'Do *you ever suffer like* [illegible] the asked with [illegible]

'Yes,' he said, and brought his face down to a level with hers as they lay there side by side. The gay world revolved around them. Quite close to them, two people sat under an umbrella laughing over some joke. A child ran by and spattered their feet with water from a bucket, piping an apology in a little high French voice: *'M'sieur, 'dame, pardon!'*

Raine saw Armand's velvet dark eyes burning down into hers. She felt the hard grip of his fingers around her wrist.

'I never stop suffering because of you,' came his voice through clenched teeth. 'I love you with every breath I draw and with every breath, I suffer. Raine, *Raine*, if you only loved *me*.'

She gave me a choked sound.

'You wouldn't tell me you loved me, then walk out on me with another girl, would you, Armand?'

'*Mon Dieu*—but give me a chance! The chance to show how faithful I would be. I would serve you with my life—until death—and after that,' he added with all the emotionalism of his Latin temperament.

But she knew that he was sincere. One of the great attributes of this young Frenchman was his enormous sincerity.

A little flame of recklessness spurted to life within Raine. That photograph of Clifford in the Café de Paris with Lilias had ignited the flame. It made her feel for the first time in her life that she wanted to sacrifice herself completely; to give love—not only because she wished to give it, but because it was so desperately needed by the other person. She wanted to make Armand happy and to be able to say to Mummy and Gammère, *and to Clifford*:

'I am engaged. I am going to marry Armand de Rougement.'

It would please Gammère in particular. And it would please *her*, Raine, because she loved Armand after her

fashion, and she might well find peace and contentment with him. *If* he were willing to take her knowing that with her, he was second-best, she thought unhappily.

Suddenly her warm slim fingers, sticky with sand and salt water, closed over his. She whispered:

'Armand—*will you marry me?*'

There was a moment of complete silence. The young man felt that not only his heart-beats stopped in that instant, but that the whole world around him came to a standstill. Then life returned—throbbing, rushing, torrential. He held her hand so tightly that it hurt her.

'Raine—*pour l'amour de Dieu*, don't play with me,' he said huskily.

'I'm not playing. I mean it.'

'You want to marry *me?*'

'Yes. That's what *you* want, isn't it?'

He drew a hand over his forehead. It was wet.

'You know that it is You know that I worship you—but...'

'Then let's become engaged,' she broke in.

He sat up and stared down at her in a positive daze.

'You don't mean this—you are crazy.'

'Very well. I'm crazy. But accept it. I suppose you *want* to accept my proposal?' she added with a broken laugh.

Yes, she laughed, but he read only unhappiness in her eyes.

'You still love this other man,' he said in a fierce undertone. 'Don't deny it. You are offering to marry me only out of pity for me.'

'No. Out of the wish to be happy with you, as well as to make you happy.'

'But...'

'Oh, Armand, Armand, don't analyse everything. Don't ask too many questions,' she interrupted again. 'Just tell me that you adore me and that we are going to be very happy. We have so much in common—why *shouldn't* we be happy?'

'You must know that my life would be spent in the endeavour to make you so. But you must think longer about this, Raine. I fear that you are doing it in a moment of—well—reaction. I could not bear you to regret it.'

She, too, sat up and pushed her hair out of her eyes with a defiant gesture.

'I shall not regret it. I shall be very happy with you, Armand,' she said in a clear voice, 'and I'm never going to think about Clifford again. You have my word.'

'I want that word only if you can swear that it will bring you contentment.'

Now she hedged a little :

'Give it a trial—give me a little time—but let us become engaged at once, and I will do everything in my power to deserve your great love, Armand.'

He went scarlet then very pale.

'Oh, *mon Dieu* !' he exclaimed. 'It is I who must try to deserve *you*. You are doing me so great an honour; and one that I never expected.'

She put out her hand again and taking his, pulled it against her cheek and held it there with a charming gesture of tenderness.

'My dear little Armand—you are very sweet and I don't think I can really do without you, I need you, Armand.'

He uncurled her twining fingers and put his lips against the palm. His kiss lingered and burned. In a muffled voice, he said :

'*Mon amour. Cœur de mon cœur.* It is too great a happiness. I can hardly credit it.'

She ruffled his curls and began to chatter in a high, light voice :

'What fun we'll have ! You shall be the greatest painter in France, and there will be dozens of different portraits of the painter's wife. They will all be masterpieces. I shall help you in your work as an architect, too. I adore de-

signing. We'll stay in France, won't we? I need not go back to London except for a short time. We'll live in Mougins if we can get a little house, or make Gammère give us a wing of Candella. Don't even let's be married in London Let's be married in the little church at Mougins. . . .'

Armand listened, entranced; quite unable to believe that such a miracle had happened He kept covering her hand with kisses After a moment she said:

'Give me back that *Tatler.*'

He leaned over, grabbed at it, and handed it to her. She pulled out the photograph of Clifford, tore it in pieces and buried them in the sand.

'Now,' she said with a childish expression of satisfaction, 'you see how I feel about him.'

He tried to believe her but he doubted . . . and deep down he wondered if this was not all the result of 'sheer rebound' with her—that most dangerous of all emotional states. But he was too much in love to argue or deny her.

'My beloved, I swear I'll *make* you happy,' he kept stammering.

She almost began to believe it. A new feeling seized her—something approaching relief because she had found this outlet for her emotions. With the burying of Clifford's torn pictured face she had buried her pain, she told herself. Never again would she suffer for any man. She would just be selfish and let Armand love *her*—more than she loved him.

For an hour or two she seemed elated and quite as happy as Armand. Hand in hand they raced into the water and swam together. Afterwards, they dressed again and Armand drove her back to Candella.

'I must tell Mummy and Gammère that we're going to be married,' Raine said. 'then you shall take me out and we will celebrate tonight. We will dine at home, then go on to the Casino if you like, and dance. I like dancing

with you, Armand. Do you remember Jennifer's Coronation Ball when we first waltzed together?'

Did he remember? Yes—that and a thousand other things about Raine. How very deeply he had fallen in love with her in that first moment of gazing into her grey luminous eyes. And how deeply he had regretted that she had given her love to the wrong man. He could only pray now with all his soul that he was the right one for her, and that she would never be sorry for what she had said to him—for the promises she had just made—on this crazy golden day.

Just before they climbed up the last mile to Candella, they came to a little woodland. Armand pulled the Renault to one side of the road and switched off the engine.

Turning, he gave her a smile that held a boyish youthful appeal in it.

'*Chérie*—do you realise that I have never kissed you yet?' he asked.

She smiled back and leaned towards him. He caught her in his arms. For him it was an intoxicating moment. He felt the sweetness of her against his heart and that warm red mouth moving under his own. He kissed her, knowing that this was a deathless passion, for which he was prepared to die if need be. That even if his happiness was not to last and she would go from him as suddenly as she had come into his life—he must take what the gods offered now. Forgotten Clifford Culver, forgotten Yvonne.

Raine tried to infuse an equal passion into her kiss—she found him a sweet and adept lover, yet she knew that there was a portion of her that was cold and dead . . . an all too large fragment of her heart that was still in heartless Clifford's keeping. After a moment, Armand raised his head, conscious that her face was bathed in tears.

'Oh, Raine—*ma douce chérie*, why do you cry?' he asked, and fervently drank the tears with his kisses.

She did not answer and he did not repeat the question.

15

'I think,' said the Comtesse de Chagny, 'that this calls for a celebration My *migraine* is better and I am going to hold a dinner-party for the three of us. Send Hélène to me. See that champagne is put on the ice. We will dine together and, later, you young people can go into Cannes and dance at the Casino. I am very *very* happy. Very happy indeed.'

Raine and Armand stood at the foot of the Comtesse's bed in the big cool room which was still shuttered from the sun. A light burned over her head from a gilded cornice in the old four-poster. Adrienne de Chagny leaned [illegible]

daughter to the young architect to whom she had grown so sincerely attached.

'Nothing has given me greater happiness for years,' she added. 'We must send a telegram to your mother, *ma p'tite* Raine.'

'Yes, that will be fun,' said Raine

Armand advanced to the Comtesse's side.

'You do me a great honour, *Madame la Comtesse* I do not feel worthy. I have very little money yet or position to offer Raine, although I know I shall make more for her in time.'

The Comtesse beamed on him

'You will make plenty and be a great man in the

world of art, Armand. Money need not worry you, anyhow. My granddaughter will have as much as she wants. She will inherit Candella and everything that goes with the estate when I die.'

'I do not wish to think of that,' Armand said quickly.

'I believe you mean it,' she said tenderly.

'Of course he does, Armand is truly romantic,' put in Raine.

'Well, anyhow, you will receive twenty million francs from me on the day of your marriage, my darling,' said the Comtesse.

Armand uttered an exclamation :

'I don't know that I wish to marry such a rich girl. I would like to support my own wife,' he stammered.

'The money can stay in the bank and be there when you need it,' the Comtesse said.

Armand kissed her hand.

'I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the trust you have in me, and for the great honour you pay me by allowing me to marry Raine,' he said.

Raine walked with him to the door. He would have kissed her hand, but she curved an arm around his neck and drew his flushed radiant face down to hers.

'I really do love you quite a lot,' she whispered.

'Be happy—that's all I ask,' he said in a low voice, kissed her swiftly and was gone.

With a sigh, Raine returned to her grandmother and perched on the edge of the bed.

'Well, that's *that*, Gammère.'

'And he says he has a diamond and sapphire ring that belonged to his own grandmother and that he has kept it locked away for his future wife, and you will be receiving it tonight,' said the Comtesse dreamily. Then, with a long look at her granddaughter, she added : 'How did this come about, Raine? Was it that you fell suddenly in love with him, *ma chérie*?'

Raine lowered her lashes. Her expression became inscrutable.

'I've always liked Armand.'

'"Like" is surely not the right word for a girl to use about her betrothed.'

'I am extremely fond of him then—devoted.'

'But not madly in love?'

Raine moved uncomfortably, worried by this cross-examination.

'Perhaps not as *you* mean it. But it will come—I dare say.'

'You mean that you still care for the Englishman?'

Raine closed her lips tightly, then said:

'Don't let's talk about him, Gammère.'

But the Comtesse also was uneasy, remembering her duplicity and those intercepted letters. However, she felt enormously elated by the way things had turned out. She could not have been more pleased about the engagement if her granddaughter had chosen one of the great titles in France. No man she knew would love and cherish Raine more devotedly than Armand, nor make a more appreciative owner, in time to come, of this her beloved monastery. The place he had helped to restore. She decided that perhaps Raine's decision to marry Armand had been hewn from a rock-like determination to put Clifford right out of her life and build a new one for herself—with a young man of whom she had grown sincerely fond. Well, in time she would grow more than fond of Armand. Of that, Adrienne de Chagny felt supremely confident. She opened her arms and gathered the girl close.

'God bless you, darling. We will have a most joyful evening and I know that your mother will come hurrying back full of delight.'

'I might phone home when I'm in Cannes, Gammère, and tell Mummy to put the notice in *The Times* at once,' said Raine.

he Comtesse chewed her lips.
he wants the Englishman to see it, the old lady re-
ted. *There are all kinds of ulterior motives behind
sudden engagement. I hope no harm will come of it
ither to her or to Armand.*

Hélène came in to take orders. From now onwards ere would be a rush; the old house drowsing in the armth of the late afternoon must wake up. There ould be considerable activity in the kitchens. Bertil ust be found to pick more vegetables. The best grapes nd peaches would be put on the table tonight. Cook vould make her famous *Soufflé Grand Marnier.* It was a pity that poor Rose was not here (her daughter was always 'poor Rose' in the Comtesse's mind because of the early loss Rose had suffered of her husband, and the failure in her relationship with her only child). But now, surely, Rose could not complain for as Madame de Rougement, little Raine would hold quite a position in Paris as well as here in the Midi.

In her own bedroom, Raine opened the shutters and stood a moment breathing in the intoxicating sweetness of the sun-warmed geraniums and that wonderful blue lavender which was so deliciously aromatic at this time of the year.

Provence was lovely, she thought. The languorous South had never seemed more perfect. And she was be-trothed to a poetic, charming young man who adored her. She would not have to return to the London flat for long, and be subjected to her mother's tyranny. She could return to live here in the Midi as the wife of a well-known architect and painter. And in a few days' time, people in London, like Cousin Jennifer and Lilias Fitz-bourne, would read the announcement of her engage-ment. Clifford would not be able to boast that he ha broken *her* heart.

Suddenly Raine closed the shutters, turned back in her darkened room and threw herself down on to h

bed, pressing a fevered cheek against the cool linen pillow-case. She thought:

'*I mustn't feel like this* I mustn't marry Armand just to spite Clifford. I must remember that it is to make Armand happy, and I am not to think of myself. Perhaps I have been too selfish in the past. People who think only of themselves and what they want out of this life can never be happy. Armand is sweet and good. I will become all that he wants me to be.'

She got up and went to the tall carved cedar-wood *armoire*, opened it, and searched in the scented depths for a dress to wear tonight. Deliberately she chose the fluffy white one which she had worn for Jennifer's Ball, and which she had been wearing when she first met Armand. They were going to dance at the Casino. She would look her loveliest for him.

She took especial care with her make-up, re-varnished her nails to a charming rosy red, and sent Hélène out to pick two roses for her to pin at her belt. Armand liked to associate her with roses.

She decided that she would be wildly happy this evening. She was going to receive her engagement-ring and become, in truth, Armand's betrothed. Her volatile spirits soared as she thought about it and continued to dress. She sang a little *Provençal* love song that she had learned out here years ago. She had just finished dressing when Hélène knocked, and came into her room bearing a huge gilt basket filled with red roses; gorgeous, dewy blooms standing out from a bed of moss on their long, slender stems. Hélène's sun-tanned peasant's face was all smiles. With the privilege of an old-established *bonne* she waggled a finger at the young girl.

'Oh, *la la!* . . . see what *Monsieur* has sent you. *L'amour, l'amour!*' she laughed.

Happily Raine regarded the magnificent basket that Hélène set down on the table by her window. The shutters were open now, letting in the violet beauty of the

tranquil summer's night. Raine picked a card from the roses and read it:

For you, my heart's darling, who are more perfect and lovely than all the roses in the world. Je t'adore.

Armand.

She laughed a little excitedly under her breath, catching her lip between her teeth. It really was quite exciting to have such an enchanting lover. Remorselessly Raine trod on the memory of Clifford and the flowers *he* had once sent her, and which had brought her such feverish and mistaken joy. A joy that had been all too ephemeral.

She pirouetted in her white dress before Hélène, spreading out the skirts like a ballerina.

'*Que vous êtes belle!* But so *pretty* tonight, *Mademoiselle*!' Hélène exclaimed, clapping her hands.

'Tell my grandmother she will find me downstairs,' said Raine. And she drew off the roses she had pinned to her belt, and cut off two of Armand's flowers and wore them instead.

'I'm going to be happy. *I am.*' She kept repeating it to herself as she ran down the beautiful wide staircase which was hung with priceless tapestries, into the big hall where the candelabra were already shedding a gentle golden lustre against the panelled walls. There was no twilight in the South—only a swift transition from day to night. Already darkness had fallen.

Raine wandered into the dining-room to make sure that the table was properly arranged. Gammère's loveliest silver, hand-painted china, and delicate gilded Venetian glass had been brought out tonight. Red roses in a Sèvres bowl on the table, too; tall wax candles in antique silver-gilt sconces, waiting to be lit. Champagne for the celebration on ice in a silver bucket. A gay little party, although now, more tenderly than usual, Raine remembered her mother. No doubt she had always been a real

disappointment to poor Mummy. She wished her mother were here to join the little party tonight. It would please her. Although, Raine reflected mischievously, Mummy was sure to wish secretly that Armand had a *slightly* more distinguished background. She was one of those women who were *never* quite satisfied—with anything.

Hélène came into the dining-room.

'*Mademoiselle*, there is a gentleman to see you. He has just driven from Nice. I told him you were busy but he said it was important and he would not keep you long.'

Raine picked up her wide flounced skirt and danced a few steps across the dining-room.

'Who is it, Hélène—one of Gammère's friends?'

'No, *Mademoiselle*, I have not seen him before. *C'est un Anglais.*'

Even then Raine shrugged her shoulders, having no idea who would be calling at this hour. A great many people, known to Gammère, visited Candella on their way to or from Paris or London.

Without the least suspicion of what was about to happen—she walked into the hall. But on the threshold she paused—stood stock-still, every vestige of colour draining from her face. With a sense of unutterable shock she recognised the tall familiar figure and handsome head of Clifford Culver. He was standing with his back to her, looking through one of the tall open windows at the twinkling lights from the mountain villages below Candella. Then he turned and faced the girl in her white dress with the festive roses pinned to her belt. He stubbed the cigarette he had been smoking, into an ash-tray, and smilingly came towards her.

'Ah—hullo Raine,' he said. 'I expect you are surprised to see me.'

16

'Surprise' was a mild word to describe what Raine felt in that moment of supreme shock. Her heart beat so violently that it made her dizzy. Her legs trembled. As Clifford advanced towards her she began to edge away from him as though from an apparition which frightened her. She gasped:

'What are you doing here?'

Clifford put his hands in his coat pockets and raised his brows as though with surprise.

'Is that your welcome for me? How you've changed.'

'How dare you accuse *me* of changing—after the way you've behaved.'

At first he mistook her meaning; taking it for granted that she had heard about his association with Lilias and was jealous—that was all.

'Really, my sweet, I don't think you're quite justified in accusing *me* of behaving badly, and if it's Lilias you're worrying about . . .'

'I'm not worrying about her,' Raine broke in. 'I don't care about her or any other girl you choose to go out with. You're entitled to do what you like. You're entitled to change your mind about *me*. It was just the way you did it. Not to answer one of my letters—that last one—when I begged you to write—when you knew how much it meant to me . . .' she broke off, choking. She was beginning to feel more normal—better able to cope with this situation. At the same time she thought: *'In a few moments Armand will be arriving and Gammère will*

come down. What a hideous position to find myself in!'

She heard Clifford's voice; he took a cigarette from a thin gold case, snapped on a lighter, drew in a breath of smoke and then blew it through his nostrils. He was still smiling in a faintly derisive fashion.

'My sweet Raine, it's the "pot calling the kettle black". You have only written *me one* letter since you went away—one only, and that was almost a month ago.'

Her eyes opened wide.

'But it's not true. I wrote every day for weeks and weeks to begin with. But it was too much—never getting a reply. I thought at first that you might be ill or that something awful had happened. Then I rang your home. Your aunt told me that you had gone to Norway with the Fitzbournes. So I knew that nothing was the matter with your health, and that it was just that you didn't *want* to write to me.'

Clifford's smile faded.

'Look here, my dear, this is becoming ridiculous. I on't say I wrote you every day, but certainly three times week for a long time. I sent a couple of wires, too, either of which you answered. The last letter was from orway. I told you that I was old Fitzbourne's guest and ving a good time, and that it was obvious to me you re having such a good time over here you must have further use for me, and that unless you answered it ld be the end for us. You can't possibly say you n't heard *from me*. My secretary will confirm [illegible] like to ring her—she posted any number of my letters ou.'

ence. A deeply anxious, puzzled look had come into 's eyes. Her fingers twitched nervously [illegible] andkerchief she was holding. A [illegible] d roses at her waist dropped to the [illegible] her up and down with that [illegible] which he reserved for pretty women [illegible] that he had never seen Raine [illegible]

vastating. He recognised the dress, of course; but the creamy colour suited her better now that she was tanned to such a rich dark gold. He liked that new short hair style with winged black silky hair curving back from her forehead. She was incredibly slender, too. What a waist! She appeared to him altogether fragile and delicious after Lilias's riper, more buxom charms. Physically, Raine had always appealed more than Lilias to the big blond man.

Softly he said:

'I must say you are what they would call in this country *"en beauté" ce soir*. I admit I was angry with you but now that I see you again I can't keep up the anger. I'm still crazy about you, sweet.'

'Why did you come?' she almost gasped the question.

'I wanted to hear from you, in person, why you changed your mind about me and ignored all my letters. Is it another man?'

She ignored that last remark. She said:

'Don't keep accusing me of not having written you. I sent you dozens and *dozens* of letters. Go and ask our old postman here in St. Candell. He always stamped them for me.'

Clifford gave her a sweeping bow.

'Go and ask my secretary who posted all *my* letters to *you*.'

'Oh, this is absurd,' exclaimed Raine in a nervous, rather angry voice. 'One of us must be lying.'

'I haven't always kept strictly to the truth, my dear,' he said. 'One has to prevaricate at times to get anywhere in this hard world, but I swear to you that I *did* write to you and that I *did* wire, and I can prove it to you.'

'All right,' said Raine, breathing fast. 'I can prove to you that *I* wrote, too.'

Clifford pulled at the lobe of his ear. A wary look crept into his handsome blue eyes.

'Could it be that one of your fond family has been tampering with our mail?'

'Oh!' exclaimed Raine in a shocked voice. 'Of course not.'

'It has been known.'

'I tell you I posted the letters myself and . . .' She broke off. Her mind was in a turmoil. All that Clifford had been saying and inferring had flung her back into a state of mental chaos. Suddenly she put the back of her hand to her lips and her eyes dilated. Supposing it was true. Supposing Cliff *had* written and somebody had kept his letters from her . . . Mummy . . . even *Gammère*.

Clifford's voice interrupted this sinister train of thought:

'By the way—have I come at an inopportune moment? You look as though you are about to throw a party in that charming dress You're lovelier than ever if I may be allowed to say so Or don't you want me to say pretty things to you any more?'

'Stop being sarcastic,' she broke out, her breathing rapid. The pupils of her eyes were large and dark. She had seldom felt so mentally distressed or confused. Then she broke out with a choked sound that might have been a sob or a laugh:

'If you want to know, Gammère is holding a dinner-party to celebrate my engagement.'

Clifford froze.

'Indeed!'

'Yes—to Armand de Rougement. You met him at Jennifer's Ball.'

Clifford's eyes narrowed. The smile on his lips was no longer pleasant to see.

'Oh! The little Frenchman! Let me see—he's an architect, isn't he?'

'Yes.'

'I seem to remember him,' drawled Clifford. 'Tch, tch, how sad to find one's true love no longer true. And I always thought you'd be the faithful kind.'

'Be quiet!' she said passionately; 'don't go on at me like that, *don't*.'

He changed his tune.

'Look, darling,' he said more gently, and held out a hand, 'this has been a great shock. The whole thing has knocked me sideways. Whether there has been some funny stuff going on or not, I don't know, but I assure you I've written to you regularly and that I've never changed in my attitude towards you. I've taken Lilias out—yes'—he shrugged—'*fait de mieux*, but it was no crime for me to go fishing with her and Papa, was it?'

'No,' said Raine in a whisper, 'no crime at all.'

He reached her side. Putting his hands on both her shoulders he drew her slowly towards him. He looked down at her with all the passionate intensity and love that she remembered and which she thought for ever lost to her. This was unbelievable . . . Cliff, her golden-viking of a man, here in Candella, telling her that he still loved her. After the long weeks of silence and suffering she was thrown completely off her balance.

'Darling,' he murmured, 'I flew over to see you because I couldn't bear to let you go until I heard from your own lips that you didn't love me any more. But it isn't true; you *do* still love me, don't you, Raine?'

She stood irresolute. A feeling akin to panic seized her. The touch of his hands, the sound of that caressing voice that had once opened the gates of ecstasy to her—struck through the vulnerable chink in her armour. That part of Raine which still belonged to him seemed to awaken. She wanted to throw herself into his arms and be kissed by him madly again and again until there were no doubts left, and until she felt spiritually as well as physically close to him once more. At the same time she could not so swiftly readjust her emotions. *She could not forget Armand*. Armand who loved her just as much as she used to love Clifford. She had given him her promise. Gammère had blessed them. And tonight was a celebra-

tion; he was about to bring her the ring of betrothal. What an *impossible* situation!

She drew back from Clifford as though from a terrible temptation.

'No—wait—I don't admit anything—I won't let you talk me round.'

He smiled as he might smile at a small girl who was frightened and needed reassurance. He was beginning to feel more sure of himself, and quite certain that Raine was still in love with him. He suspected that her mother had intercepted their letters. As for her engagement to the Frenchman, he was not going to allow *that*. No—not if he had to knock the little fellow sideways again. Raine was a 'better bet' than Lilias, and a good deal more attractive; in fact, so strong was her attraction for Clifford tonight . . . lovely, delicate, inaccessible Raine . . . that he wanted her more than he had ever done in the past. He might even be willing, he decided, to marry her whether she came into the money or not, and do a bit of really hard work, himself, for a change. He said:

'Look, darling—it must be obvious to you that I wouldn't have flown over here to see you if I hadn't still loved you. I came at the risk of you snubbing me. Darling, we've *got* to find out about this letter business.'

She was not listening to him. She was hearing the sound of a car door slam. She felt quite sick. That must be Armand. It *must* be. She couldn't let the two men meet—not like this . . . with so much left unexplained. She couldn't face Armand now; for she hadn't the least idea of what she meant to do.

Suddenly she caught at one of Clifford's hands and clung to it convulsively. 'Come with me . . .' she gasped.

He followed her willingly enough. She pulled him through the door, along a stone corridor, and out at the back of the house into a courtyard. A small Fiat stood there; a little car used by the chauffeur for shopping when Gammère did not want to take the big Citroën

which, in fact, Armand had discovered hidden away under a pile of rubbish when he was clearing out one of the rooms in a turret on the north side of the monastery.

This Knight, whose history they had traced, had occupied Candella before it became a religious house—when it was fortified—as the nobles of the eleventh century had to fortify themselves—against possible invaders.

The Chevaliar had brought a beautiful Italian wife here who had been born in the small seaport of Candella on the south coast of Italy. It was after that that the building had taken its Italian-sounding name. It was supposed, too, that the little village had received the more French version of 'St. Candelle' during the same period, although nothing was known of any saint of that name.

The Comtesse liked to see six candles burning beneath this portrait which was beautifully executed in rich colours and for which Armand had found a magnificent Florentine frame.

Most of the great *salon* was furnished in the ornate style of the Italian Renaissance. The gilt painted chests and tables, the exquisitely carved chairs with their faded blue velvet seats, the sweeping brocade curtains had belonged to the de Chagnys of the past. The Aubusson tapestry hanging on the wall at the far end, and the wonderful rugs on the polished floor had been bought in Paris by Adrienne de Chagny, herself, in her youth.

When she was first married, the Comtesse used to live in one of those dignified aristocratic little houses in a fashionable quarter of Paris. Candella had for centuries belonged to her husband's family, but had not been used as a residence by the last Count, who was not at all interested in archaeology and regarded his vast monastery as a 'white elephant'. Being a man of wealth, he had made it habitable during the Second World War in order to turn it into a Convalescent Home for officers of the French Army. After the fall of France the Comtesse, then

widowed and driven out of Paris, opened the sma rooms downstairs and resided there in conderable comfort, alone with Hélène. Fortunately, after one l visit from German Staff Officers, she was left in pe: But she had been close to starvation many times a suffered from the intense cold—unable to get fuel for l stoves. The Comtesse abandoned Paris altogether aft the war ended and settled in St. Candelle, where sl started seriously upon the restoration of Candella, whic project had been financially aided by the death of a brother who left her his entire fortune Raine, brought to Candella on her twelfth birthday, used to spend every summer here afterwards and watch the old place coming to life, ga ning a new magnificence with every passing year. But i was only during these last twelve months that the Comtesse had called in *Maçon Frères*, and thus met Armand de Rougement. His artistic appreciation had helped her to fulfil her final ambition to turn the old monastery into one of the most beautiful homes in the South of France.

How she loved it, particularly in this soft candlelight, she thought, this evening. It never failed to thrill her. *But where was Raine?*

'Hélène—what are you looking like that for—go, find *Mademoiselle*,' she said sharply.

Then the old woman faltered.

'*Madame la Comtesse* . . . pardon . . . *Mademoiselle* gone out.'

Armand, who had been standing with his back to the women, hands laced behind him, looking up at the bearded face of the Chevalier, admiring, as he al- did, the bold sweeping strokes of the painter who executed the painting, swung round.

e Comtesse gave a sharp exclamation:

ne out?'

, *Madame la Comtesse*,' said the old servant, and terrified.

It so happened that Hélène had been looking out into the courtyard at the moment when Raine entered the Fiat with the English gentleman. It was not that she wished to spy or to carry tales for she loved Mlle Raine devotedly. But strange things were happening . . . Babette, the young village girl who came in to 'do vegetables' for the cook when there was a party, had also seen *Mademoiselle* drive away. They were gossiping downstairs and Hélène did not like it. She was a simple woman. It was not difficult for the Comtesse to extract the truth from her. There were actually tears in Hélène's faded old eyes as she recounted the story of the arrival of the English gentleman in a hired car from Nice . . . yes, he had asked for *Mademoiselle*, she said . . . none other. . . . Then they had driven away in the Fiat and *Mademoiselle* in her thin dance dress, too, and without a wrap, *la, la*! Hélène deplored it. *Mademoiselle* would catch a cold even though the night was so warm.

—who had *asked* him to marry her, only a few hours
—*had driven away with this man.*

He could not speak, it was as though his tongue clo
to the roof of his mouth. The Comtesse herself, as ivo
pale as the chiffon ruching at her throat, spoke agai
This time her voice trembled slightly.

'What does this mean? What are you thinking, Ar
mand?'

Armand tried to utter the name of Clifford Culver bu
it would not come. He knew that his unhappy suspicions
were shared by the Comtesse, herself. He could see the
old lady's hand shaking over the knob of her stick; the
diamonds on the thin long fingers glittered and winked.
She said:

'This is too much. Whether it is *he* or not . . . *it is too
much*. Unpardonable of my granddaughter!'

Now Armand found his voice.

'Let us wait till she comes back. She will have an
explanation.'

The Comtesse shut her eyes. She felt positively ill. She
was thinking:

'*Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* If only Rose were here to
stand by me. If it is the Englishman . . . if he has dared
to come here . . . he will tell Raine about the letters, and
she will know everything. We are lost!'

Armand came to the old lady's side. She opened her
eyes and looked at him. She saw the distress on his thin
young face. Her heart bled for him. She put up one of
her fine hands and touched his sleeve.

'*Mon pauvre Armand* . . .' she whispered.

He interrupted her almost fiercely.

'Surely, *Madame*, there is no need to pity me yet. We
do not know anything.'

The Comtesse made an expressive gesture with both
hands and stayed silent. In a moment, she reflected,
migraine would come back and she would have to
go upstairs and lie down. There would be no celebration

dinner. Great heavens! If Hélène were right and Raine had driven away in that mad fashion with an English gentleman . . . what else could it mean but that Mr. Clifford Culver from London had come here and taken her away.

There was not so much a feeling of guilt in the old lady's heart for the part she had played, as of bitter resentment against her granddaughter. How could she do such a scandalous thing? And quite apart from the scandal, how could she behave so cruelly to this fine young man who was her devoted slave?

'I shall never forgive her. I shall cut her out . . .' Adrienne Chagny said the words half to herself and half aloud.

Armand did not hear them. With the sweat pouring down his cheeks, he walked to one of the open windows and stepped on to the balcony. There, he wiped his streaming face. His heart was like lead within him. He stared bleakly across the lights that twinkled in the purple distance towards the silvery radiance along the Côte d'Azur. Putting a hand in his pocket, his fingers clenched over the little box which contained his grandmother's ring. The ring that he had meant to put on Raine's finger to mark their betrothal. In a welter of despair he asked himself what he had ever done to deserve this agony of disappointment and frustrated love? A dozen other questions rose to his mind, too. *Was it Clifford* who had taken Raine away? Of course it must be. *Why* had he come, if he was entangled with Lilias Fitzbourne? It could only be that he had decided that he still wanted Raine. Yet what excuse could he make for his outrageous neglect of her? And where was Raine's determination to be proud. How weakly she must have given in, at first sight of him.

Oh, Raine, Raine, cœur de mon cœur, amour de ma vie, Armand cried silently as he stood there, staring into the night.

Then he heard the sound of a car. A car coming the private roadway to Candella.

He swung round and went back into the *salon* to old lady who was sitting like a figure of grief in her hig backed chair, her head bowed.

'*Madame*, I think it is she. I think Raine is comi back,' he stammered.

She raised her head.

'Go down and see. Go and meet her . . .' she said

Then, as Armand moved towards the beautiful double doors with their fine carved panels, she called after him :

'If it is *the man*, too, I will not have him in this house. He is not to be admitted.'

Armand went down the stairs His legs felt leaden, scarcely able to propel him forward. He walked as though to his doom. As a man might go to his execution, barely conscious, yet aware that he walked to his death. He had to force himself to go on. *If* this was Raine returning, *he must see her*. He must know what she had to say.

Perhaps, he thought, with a sudden wild spurt of hope, we are mistaken, and it is not Culver at all

Armand heard a car-door shut, then the crunch of wheels as it moved off again. He had not reached the front door before it opened

Raine walked in—alone

She stopped on the threshold She saw Armand standng there, sleek and unfamiliar in his white dinner-jacket nd black bow tie. She looked at him as though she ardly recognised him She had a dazed expression on er colourless face. He, on his part, regarded her with a orld of anguished questioning in his eyes How beauti- she was, he thought dully, how ethereal, entrancing in at gossamer ball dress, pearls in her ears and round her sts and brown shoulders bare, polished like bronze. the red roses at her waist were crushed and droop- They had lost most of their petals The dark curhair was untidy She looked as he had never seen

her before—dishevelled, and *years older*. There was little left of the fresh, radiant girl who had lain beside him, laughing, in the sun at Juan this morning.

She came towards him, brushing her hair back with a nervous gesture. She spoke in a colourless voice, obviously making an attempt to be casual.

'Oh, hullo, Armand. I'm afraid I've kept dinner waiting.'

He said:

'Where have you been, Raine? *Who were you with?*'

She drew nearer. How his very soul was shaken as he saw her smeared lip-rouge. It had a strangely physical assault upon him as though he could actually see her now before his very gaze in another man's arms; that man's lips pressing passionate kisses on her mouth, the sweetness of which had turned him, Armand, into a super-man only a few short hours ago.

'Who were you with?' he repeated violently.

She looked at him with unnaturally brilliant eyes.

'I don't think you had better ask.'

'I have a right to know.'

Then she gave a brief laugh.

'Of course. If we are to be married, you are permitte to ask me questions. Are you going to be a jealous hu band, Armand?'

He could not bear her flippancy in this bitter hour. Th awful waiting upstairs with her grandmother had ann hilated his own sense of humour. He went close to h and gripped her wrist. He spoke for the first time to h roughly, as he had never done before, his face red:

'Raine ... *pour l'amour de Dieu*, what is this all abou

'You will find out.'

'I know. It was Clifford Culver.'

'Yes, it was Clifford Culver.'

He licked his dry lips.

'Why did he come?'

'To see me and ask me why I hadn't answered his letters.'

'There were no letters to answer, he did not answer you.'

'*Because he received no letters from me. We both wrote.* Our letters were kept. Do you hear, Armand? All the letters we wrote each other were intercepted.'

[illegible]

would not lose his job, since I *dragged* the story from him. He would not tell me at first but I *made* him. I told him that it was a crime to hand my correspondence over to someone else. Then, when he confessed, I forgave him. I know how ruthless Gammère can be. My mother, too, they have both been ruthless. My mother connived at this with my grandmother. What a pretty spectacle! Two ladies of high principle, of so-called integrity, conspiring to steal letters that were my sacred property.'

She broke off. No flippancy or composure now, but a trembling that seized all her limbs. She covered her face with her hands.

'Clifford came because he wanted to make sure,' she added in a muffled voice 'He still loves me'

Armand's world seemed to reel around him, but he spoke calmly. His blurred gaze was on the lovely tragic figure; but he was thankful that her face was hidden from him.

'And you still love him? But, of course, I need not ask. I regret, infinitely, that you were put to all this unnecessary pain. It was very wrong of your grandmother and your mother, but no doubt they thought they acted for the best—the best for you. You must not judge them too harshly.'

She raised her head Now he was forced to look upon

her white, changed face. Her eyes were full of tears.

'I don't feel I ever want to see them again—either of them.'

Silence. A voice from upstairs; the low imperious voice of the old Comtesse :

'Raine . . . is that you? Come upstairs.'

The girl glanced upward in the direction of the voice. Then she looked through the dining-room doorway at the candles which were burning on a festive table which had been laid for the party to celebrate her engagement to Armand de Rougement.

Armand spoke :

'I had better go. Naturally you will not want me here, and, of course, you can consider yourself entirely free. Our short engagement is at an end.'

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Now, it seemed as though Raine came to life—dragging herself out of her stupor of pain.

She fixed Armand with a curiously cold yet sad look.

'No, Armand, our engagement rests'

His colour heightened.

'I do not think so You became engaged to me believing that your—your Mr. Culver'—he could hardly bring himself to use the name—'had let you down. Now you know this is not the case, so under no circumstances shall I bind you to your promise.'

'That is generous of you, Armand,' she said in a low voice, and gave a long sigh as though she was infinitely tired, 'but it is too late. I have sent *him* away.'

'He can be recalled—quite easily.'

'No. He has gone to a hotel in Cannes and tomorrow morning he flies back to London.'

'Look here, Raine, this is absurd. Do you think I want you as a sacrifice, a martyr?'

'I have decided,' she said, 'I am not going away with Clifford. I am going to marry you—with the full sanction of my loyal and loving grandmother.'

Armand looked at her steadily then shook his head

'*Ma mie*, you are distraught; you do not know what you are saying.' The words came from him very quietly although his own heart was rocketing then plunging again, and he was beset by fears both for her and for himself.

'Let us put an end to this farce,' he added.

'Don't you want me any more, Armand?'

That question whipped the blood into his face.

'That is not fair.'

'I ask you again—don't you want me any more?'

'You know that I love you better than my life, but I cannot take you knowing that this other man has come back into your life and made full explanation for his conduct and that you still love him; that you loved him enough to want to go to the *Poste* and drag the truth out of old Saville. You *wanted* to hear it.'

'Naturally. It would have been grossly unjust to Clifford, and to myself, if we had each continued to believe the other had walked out without a word.'

The voice of the Comtesse de Chagny sounded nearer to them now. Raine's grandmother was coming downstairs slowly with the aid of her stick and one delicate hand on the banisters.

'What is all this about?' she called out imperiously. 'Raine, you naughty child, where have you been? Dinner is spoiling. Hélène says that cook is in a fine temper...'

She paused. Raine gazed up at that figure—once so beloved—with eyes of stone; with something approaching hatred in her heart. The old lady looked back and read that expression. She quailed before it; instinct warned her that her worst suspicions were founded. The English visitor had been *he*...

During that death-cold silence Armand felt that the minutes were ticking away to eternity and that there was no end to sorrow or despair, or to the cruelties that human beings practise upon the ones they most love. Always, always, he thought, in the trail of great love comes bitterness and a sorrow almost past bearing.

'Raine,' his voice implored her, 'let me go, please. We *cannot* celebrate our engagement now.'

She answered with an unaccustomed violence. She who was usually so gentle.

'You say that you love me more than your life, so please continue to regard me as your promised wife.'

'But why, *why?*'

'Because I will not under any circumstances go back on my word to you. I asked you this afternoon to marry me and I ask it again.'

[illegible] he [illegible]

'Perhaps,' she said, 'a few. Of course, I know now that he wrote to me. But whether the old complete love and faith can be restored between us I do not know. You cannot go through what I have been through all these weeks, doubting and resenting, and feel quite the same. The seeds of mistrust and suspicion have been sown in me. One cannot uproot them in a moment. Besides—I am very attached to you, Armand. You are my dearest friend. I would not want you to be hurt as I have been hurt.'

'I will not go on with this if it is merely pity you are offering me.'

'Oh, don't argue,' she begged him wearily; 'if you still care for me, take me as I am, without further argument. I shall not marry Clifford now, I assure you.'

He opened his lips to protest further then shut them again. She seemed so obdurate. Yet he wondered what had passed between these two. A wild relief had surged through his whole being because she had refused to accept his offer to free her. But he could not quite believe that she meant it; neither was he sure that he had any right to accept her proposal now. Everything had been spoilt. That man—*damn him*—had come to Candella and spoiled everything.

'Let us have dinner, Armand,' said Raine.

For a second he laid a hand on her shoulder. The smooth dark gold of her skin felt cold despite the heat of the Mediterranean night. And he could not bear the

new hard bitterness that had replaced all the joy which had sparkled in her eyes earlier today.

'Oh, Raine,' he said, 'do not let us take too many decisions tonight. This all wants well thinking over. It has been such a shock.'

Now the very faintest smile broke the coldness of her face and with an involuntary gesture she gave him her hand.

'Dear Armand—come along, we mustn't keep the dinner waiting any longer.'

'What are you going to say to your grandmother?' he whispered.

'Absolutely nothing—for the moment,' she whispered back.

The old woman and the young one came face to face in the candle-lit dining-room which was so full of the perfume of crimson roses, the grace and beauty of glorious silver, of snow-white embroidered linen and Sèvres china laid on that long refectory table. A table that had been polished, centuries ago, by the monks who had once eaten here.

The Comtesse, seated at the head, leaned back in her high, carved chair and cast a nervous glance at the tight-lipped girl beside her.

'Well—where have you been, Raine?' she asked.

Raine looked straight into her grandmother's dark eyes and held them in a steady gaze until Adrienne de Chagny's wavered and fell. Then Raine answered coolly:

'Clifford Culver came from London to call on me. I took a short drive with him.'

The Comtesse swallowed. The sweat stood out on Armand's forehead. He could not understand Raine tonight. That she was in the grip of powerful emotions, but subduing them, he realised, but he was amazed at the way she handled the affair. It was ironical, he thought, *Madame la Comtesse* must recognise in her own flesh and blood an adversary as formidable as herself.

For Adrienne de Chagny would never forgive an act of treachery. He felt sorry for the old lady. She truly loved the girl. And the steps that she and Mrs. Oliventt had taken to keep those two apart had, in her opinion, been for Raine's own good. Nevertheless it had been a gross betrayal.

Hélène served turtle soup in white-and-gilt china bowls, then poured out the wine The Comtesse's face was paper-pale under the rouge she had delicately powdered over her cheek-bones. Her right hand, sparkling with diamonds, shook as she raised her glass. She said .

'Is that all you have to tell me, Raine?'

The girl answered in the same steady cold voice :

'That is all.'

The Comtesse licked her dry lips.

She knew now that Raine had found out. But that she chose to keep silence. That silence upset Adrienne de Chagny more than the girl's open denunciation could have done For a noisy anger is born of love, but a silent coldness is bred by hatred She could not bear to live any longer if her beloved little Raine hated her. *Mon Dieu,* the old woman thought, *why is Rose not here to back me up? I have done wrong but why must I pay for it alone?*

She spilt some of the wine because her hand trembled so badly. And she felt, *too*, a burning curiosity to find out what had happened between Raine and the Englishman. Her only comfort was the hope that the girl would marry Armand whatever had transpired. Otherwise, why should she be here at this table?

In a quivering voice, the Comtesse said .

'I wish to drink a toast—to both of you, *mes enfants*, to your happiness, *ma petite* Raine, and to yours, *mon cher* Armand.'

Raine also raised her goblet but Armand, looking at her face, seeing the doubt in those great grey eyes and th wildness of the old grief that was beginning to break mask of her face, suddenly sprang to his feet.

tolerate such punishment no matter how richly deserved.

A little while ago the dark eyes had opened and stared up at the girl's face. Scarcely audibly, Adrienne de Chagny had whispered:

'Oh, mon enfant ... je te demande pardon! ...'

In response to that pathetic appeal, Raine had kissed the distorted face, the hot tears running down her own cheeks, and said:

'I forgive you, *ma chère* Gammère—with all my heart.'

So now there was peace between them again. And when Dr. de Vitte came at a little past midnight, he announced that the patient was sleeping quite peacefully and that her pulse was a little stronger. He was even more hopeful now that the stroke would not have any lasting effect—for which they must all praise God.

It was the night-nurse who finally persuaded Raine to leave her grandmother's side and go to bed. If the old lady awoke and asked for her, she would send for *Mademoiselle* at once the nurse promised. But *Mademoiselle must* get some sleep.

Raine wondered if she would ever be able to sleep again. She went down to the library where an hour or so ago she had left Armand, being persuaded by Hélène to eat a chicken sandwich and drink some of her famous coffee.

Raine found him still there, standing by an open window looking up at the stars. Raine walked to his side. The shawl slipped from her shoulders. He picked it up and put it around her tenderly. She looked tired to death, he thought. He lifted one of her hands to his cheek with great tenderness, without passion.

'This has been hideous for you,' he said.

'You think of me—of others—never of yourslf,' she whispered.

'Nonsense,' he said with an attempt at a laugh, 'and *Madame la Comtesse ...?*'

'But why suspicion now? He *did* write. He *does* still love me. He was always in love with me.'

Armand made no answer. Again she divined his thoughts.

'Armand, I assure you, that girl Lilias, means nothing to him. He has never made love to *her*. He was just her father's guest in Norway. He was, of course, nice to her—what man wouldn't be, for she is very pretty. But I have been the only real love in Cliff's life.'

Armand flung his cigarette out into the garden. He felt that the radiance of the stars was a mockery and the things that Raine was saying mocked him, too. He knew so much more than she did. It would have been so easy to tell her now about Clifford and Lilias Fitzbourne and that bruised eye, which still gave him trouble. But he said nothing. He would say nothing until he was finally sure that she no longer wanted Clifford Culver in her life.

'Armand,' continued Raine, 'I don't blame you for doubting. It's difficult to be sure of anything in this world. After what my own dear ones did to me, I find it exceedingly difficult to believe. But I *must* give Cliff the benefit of the doubt. He swore on his oath . . .'

'That he still wants to marry you?' put in Armand.

'es,' she said in a low voice; 'he even suggested that ould go back to England with him tonight.'

An exclamation from Armand.

'Knowing that you would not be permitted to marry him until you are of age?'

'Knowing that if I went with him, Gammère and my mother would give in rather than see me disgraced.'

The young Frenchman swung round.

'But it would be disgraceful for him to force their hands in such a way and risk your honour.'

She bowed her head. She was almost too tired to think. But she remembered the moment in the car when Clifford had made that suggestion. A mad moment when she

had reverted to the passion of the past as she felt his hot kisses on her lips and her throat, and listened to his remembered endearments:

'I can't let you go again. Come back to England with me, my heavenly heart,' he had said.

Why hadn't she gone? Why had she told *him* to go and returned to Candella? Because reason had revived and saved her from being annihilated by her desire for him. Because Raine Oliventt, impulsive and passionate though she was, could never be wholly the slave of her emotions. Clifford had reckoned without that deep reserve, that sense of balance which made her different, and so much more inaccessible than the other women in his life. He had gone in to Cannes disappointed

'You won't marry the little Frenchman. He isn't right for you. You'll soon find it out and come back to me. I shall be waiting for you in London, my darling,' he had said.

But she had come back to Candella and to Armand, [illegible]

necessary to her even though she was still in love with Clifford. She could not begin to understand herself. She was torn in two. Still utterly perplexed, she stood there before Armand, the tears trickling through her fingers. But he who loved her, understood and when she whispered: 'Give me my ring, put it on my finger, Armand,' he shook his head Gently, with all the old brotherly affection, he took her in his arms and kissed her on both cheeks.

'Not tonight. You are much too upset and incapable of making a choice. There can be no such hasty engagement between us. It would not be fair to you.'

'Nor to you, perhaps,' she admitted for the first time, with her wet face pressed against his shoulder. She was sobbing but she clung to him. 'But don't let me go, Ar

mand. I'm all mixed up in my mind—but I feel [illegible] with you.'

'Poor little one,' he murmured, and stroked her [illegible] and kissed her.

'You're so good. I don't want to hurt *you*, either,' [illegible] wept.

'You are not to think of me. If your happiness lies [illegible] this other man and he wants you to marry him—[illegible] must go to him. After all, you can live in London [illegible] your mother and continue to see him—Mrs. Oliv[illegible] cannot prevent it now. And you can wait until you [illegible] of age, then decide whether it is to be *him* or *me*.'

She was shocked suddenly; she looked up at him, [illegible] eyes suffused, her lips trembling. Such nobility made [illegible] feel almost ashamed. In a queer way she was consci[illegible] of the fact that his character was so much more excell[illegible] than Clifford Culver's. Cliff had weaknesses and fau[illegible] discrepancies which were not hidden from her, where[illegible] Armand was the finest person she had ever met. Yet [illegible] she still believed that she loved Clifford. How baffli[illegible] and ironic that one should be drawn as by a magnet [illegible] what might well be the wrong direction. How dangero[illegible] and pitiless were the forces of human passions and loves[illegible]

At last she found her voice:

'You are marvellous to me—you have always bee[illegible] I thank you with all my heart.'

'I wish only to serve you, Raine. Believe that and t[illegible] to be happy. Forget our engagement. Let us become goo[illegible] friends again. Brother and sister—what you will—unt[illegible] you are quite certain what you want, and then that wh[illegible] you want is the *right thing*.'

'*That* is the difficulty.'

'It is so easy for me,' he said with a short laugh, and l[illegible] his fond, sad gaze travel over the beloved figure in t[illegible] white dress and the fringed Italian shawl. Incongruo[illegible] one ruined rose still remained pinned to her bel[illegible]

the roses he had sent to celebrate their betrothal. It hurt him to look at it. He added:

'In any case, there can be no celebration of any kind until your grandmother recovers.'

She nodded, a handkerchief to her lips. He put an arm about her and drew her towards the door.

'Go to bed, little one. You can hardly stand. Tomorrow things will seem better; and perhaps you will see your way more clearly. I will drive you into Cannes tomorrow if you wish to see *him* again before he returns to London.'

'You would do that for me?'

'I would do anything for you,' he smiled

Wordlessly she reached up, touched his cheek with her lips, then walked out of the room.

One of the last crushed petals from her rose had fallen to the floor. He picked it up and pressed it against his lips. He felt that if he had not been a man, he too would have wept with Raine that night—facing his own tragedy of broken dreams, of hopes that were fast receding into an incalculable distance.

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At last she found her voice:

'You are marvellous to me—you have always been. I thank you with all my heart.'

'I wish only to serve you, Raine. Believe that and try to be happy. Forget our engagement. Let us become good friends again. Brother and sister—what you will—until you are quite certain what you want, and then that what you want is the *right thing*.'

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19

That next morning no workmen came to Candella. For months now, a little band of them were to be seen daily piled into a rusty old open Renault arriving at the monastery, brown-faced gay Provençal labourers and skilled technicians; good-natured fellows with a flow of argot incomprehensible to anybody who has not lived amongst the Provençaux, and a genuine love of their work, and respect for the young architect who directed them.

To Adrienne de Chagny it used to be the loveliest sight—watching these merry, noisy fellows restore her ancestral home. There was dry-rot to be conquered—old powdering beams to be renewed; crumbling cracking walls and ceilings to be repaired and repainted. But today a great silence lay over Candella. Its *chatelaine* lay ill on this hot summer's morning—better, certainly, than the terrified household had at first imagined she would be—but still tragically altered.

Outside the bedroom door, her faithful old wolf-hounds, Peleas and Melisande, lay side by side, waiting anxiously. They would move away for nobody except Raine.

Armand was to have had a morning with the workmen on the eastern wall of the monastery, which had suffered most severely from the long years of neglect during the war. But this morning he had other things to do. He had to keep his promise to drive Raine into Cannes. Also, to carry out yet another distasteful mission at

her request. She had asked him to telephone Clifford his hotel and ask him not to leave Cannes until she h seen him.

In the small hours of the morning, Armand had bee seized with the deepest depression Sleep was denie him. Over and over again he looked at the ring that ha belonged to his grandmother, then closed the little bo and returned it to his pocket in an anguish of disappoint-ment. It would have all been so much easier if he could have felt confidence in Clifford, and wiped out the memory of the things he had seen and heard between Clifford and that other girl in London.

He drove himself back to his *pension* when dawn was breaking exquisitely in a pearly opalescence over the blue silk of the sea, while the sun rose above the violet rim of the mountains A quick bath and change of clothes, then Armand reached a decision—a difficult one to take—but once again, he decided that he must see and speak to Clifford Culver

It might well 'start something' which would end dis-astrously for himself; he knew, only too well, the wicked temper and lack of control in the Englishman who was physically his superior. But Armand was without fear. And now that he, himself, had been so heart-breakingly near to marrying Raine, it was to his mind imperative that he should ensure that this time she would be all right, and need fear no further disillusionment.

At ten o'clock that morning, therefore, a very surprised Clifford, seated on the terrace of his hotel lazing over coffee and *croissants* saw, through his sun-glasses, the figure of Armand de Rougement walking through the flower-filled gardens towards him

Clifford removed his glasses His pulse beats quickened a shade. He was amused, in a malicious fashion rather than worried by the sight of the slenderly built young man who wore, like so many Frenchmen of year, white shorts and sports shir

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rat [illegible] by the sight of the slenderly built young man who wore, like so many Frenchman at this time of year, white shorts and sports shirt, and a beret on

his head. But Clifford was surprised. Perhaps he even felt a tinge of respect for the 'little Frenchman's' courage. For Armand could not have forgotten what happened to him the last time he interfered in Clifford Culver's personal affairs.

Clifford knew that Raine had promised to marry de Rougement. Also, Clifford had been suffering since he said good-bye to her, from intense aggravation because she would not play as easily as he had hoped into his hands. The engagement to de Rougement—well—that did not much concern him. He knew quite well that she was not in love with Armand. She had told *him*, Clifford, that as far as he was concerned, she had not changed. It was just some ridiculous sense of loyalty, or some faint continued mistrust which made her act as she did. But while he had packed his bag this morning, Clifford had reached the unfortunate conclusion that he might have to return to Lilias—and wait the stipulated year for her; or spend a lot of money (which he could ill afford) and waste a lot of time, laying siege to Raine all over again. The trouble was that he could not get Raine out of his blood.

He rose to his feet and gave a bow of mock courtesy as Armand reached him.

'*Bon jour, Monsieur.* Why am I privileged to receive this early-morning visit?'

Armand also bowed, but in a stiff, stilted way.

'*Monsieur,*' he said, 'there are things that I must say to you before you see Raine again.'

Clifford cocked an eyebrow.

'I did not know that I *was* seeing her again. I thought I was being sent home in order that our dear little Raine should martyr herself in the cause of honour and keep the promise which she mistakenly gave you, and also satisfy her estimable family who manœuvred the whole affair in the best traditions, I might say, of French drama.'

Armand, *standing there in the sun*, felt as though a cold wind chilled him to the bone at the sound of that hated mocking voice and the sight of that handsome, self-satisfied face. There was only one word in his mind to describe Clifford. He said it to himself, soundlessly, between his teeth: '*Animal!*'

Clifford indicated the second chair at his table.

'Sit down, do. Have a cup of coffee. And tell me how you managed to snatch my girl-friend right out of my arms. Of course, your own—if I may be pardoned for saying so—will never hold her quite as well as mine.'

The red blood suffused Armand's face. His hands clenched.

'You are insufferable, *Monsieur*.'

'Oh, sit down and allow me to do likewise. I want to finish my breakfast.'

And, so saying, Clifford flung himself back into the basket-chair and poured himself out another cup of coffee. He had stopped smiling His mouth was twisted into a sneer. He shot a baleful glance over his dark glasses at Armand. 'Well . . . do you insist on standing up?'

Reluctantly Armand seated himself. He said

'Raine will be coming to see you at eleven o'clock.'

'She told me last night that she had no intention of seeing me again so I propose to fly back at that hour.'

'All the same, she *is* coming and she has asked that you should postpone your flight.'

'And why?'

'Because'—Armand cleared his throat . . . he was speaking with great difficulty and with a sickness of the heart he found hard to conquer—'I have told her that I do not consider her bound to me any longer. *Madame la Comtesse*, and *Madame* her mother, intercepted your letters to each other. Had they not done so, she would never have altered her original ideas of you Therefore, I have no right to hold her to any promise she made to me.'

Clifford flung his spoon into his saucer with a clatter

He was very conscious of the young Frenchman's extreme decency. He *must* care for Raine in a selfless fashion that was frankly beyond Clifford's comprehension. But it made him feel small and Clifford did not like being made to feel small. In consequence he was furious. He snapped:

'Am I supposed to be grateful for such generosity?'

'No, *Monsieur*, I do not want gratitude nor anything else from you, except the assurance that if Raine continues to devote her life to you—you will see to it that she is never . . . never . . . disillusioned.'

He uttered the last word in a low, stammering voice. Clifford stared at him as though he were a strange phenomenon. But he felt a new hope which, with his customary egotism, was concentrated upon himself and nobody else.

'Has Raine told you what I asked her last night?'

'Yes. She told me that you wished her to go away with you at once.'

'Have you actually come to tell me that she will do that?'

'No,' Armand rapped out the words. 'Under no circumstances can Raine be allowed to fall in with such a contemptible suggestion.'

'Contemptible,' echoed Clifford, and then gave a de- laugh, 'My dear de Rougement . . . surely a roman- opement would not be considered a contemptible on—even amongst the most conventional French?'

'Raine has no wish to walk out on her family and elope with you against all their wishes. Incidentally—the events of last night have led to the serious illness of *Madame la Comtesse*. She had a stroke last night and she is now very ill.'

'Oh, lord. I'm sorry,' muttered Clifford. But into his mind there twisted like a snake, the evil hope that the old lady might die. That would mean that Raine would come into her inheritance even before she was twenty-

one. With his tongue in his cheek he regarded Armand.

'Well, well—this is very sad,' he added, 'but if Raine does not intend to elope with me, what are her plans, might I ask?'

'To continue seeing you in London and, when she comes of age, she will decide what to do.'

Clifford's expression altered. He dropped all pretence of affability.

'If she thinks I shall hang around and wait for her to make up her mind whether she is going to marry you or *myself*, she is mistaken. She isn't the *only* girl in the world, you know!'

Silence.

A man and woman at a table nearby broke into gay laughter over some private joke. A white-coated waiter came up and asked the two *Messieurs* if they would like more coffee. Out of the large luxury-hotel strolled two glamorous-looking girls wearing exotic sun-bathing dresses; huge peasant straw hats on their heads. They climbed into a long sleek car that waited for them in front of the hotel and drove off

there *is* only one girl in the world. That is Raine. What happens to *her* is of such vital importance to me that I could honestly and without melodrama, face the end of my life, rather than see her made unhappy. Last night she was willing to marry me despite her feelings for you. But I would not allow it. And I am still willing to stand aside if you are, in truth, the *right man* for her. *Monsieur*, I find it hard to *believe* that you are the right one but *if* you are serious in your intentions, and if you forsake all others for her (that is part of the English marriage service is it not—"*forsaking all others*") I shall be satisfied.'

Clifford pulled angrily at the lobe of his ear. Once again this man's words and actions gave him an inferiority complex which he resented. He was very red as he answered:

'You're too damned noble to live, my dear de Rougement. However, I appreciate your outlook and your concern for Raine. If she is coming here to see me this morning—no doubt we'll reach a satisfactory conclusion.'

'You will not ask her to leave her home for you without the sanction of her people, will you . . .?' began Armand. 'But no . . . she would not go,' he added the last words almost to himself.

'If you're standing out of this—stand out—and leave me to manage my own affairs,' snapped Clifford.

Armand whitened.

'I still consider it "my affair" as though I were Raine's brother.'

'All the same,' said Clifford, 'you don't happen to be her brother, and I shall take my orders from her and not from you.'

'But you will answer me this. Have you finished with *Mademoiselle* Fitzbourne—or is she a second string to your bow—and still in the background?'

Clifford stood up.

'Look . . .' he said furiously. 'You know what happened to you last time you annoyed me.'

Armand also stood up. He looked at the big angry man through narrowed lids, his cheeks colourless.

'I know, *Monsieur*, and I am not, as you are—a trained boxer—but if you would enjoy another form of fighting, [illegible]

[illegible] me through if he had half a chance. But I'm not giving it to him.'

'Well, *Monsieur?*' Armand rapped out the words.

Clifford said:

'This has gone far enough. It's becoming ridiculous. I admit I lost my temper in London. I shouldn't have hit you. Let's call it a day. You stop meddling in my affairs and I'll promise you to make Raine *very* happy. Now—does that satisfy you?'

It did not satisfy Armand. The whole thing left him with a taste of ashes in his mouth and a complete sense of failure, of renewed frustration. He could not get the truth out of this man. Clifford had not answered the question about Lilias Fitzbourne. It was obvious that he meant to renew his pursuit of Raine, and there was no knowing where this thing might end. Armand had come here meaning to try and safeguard his Love—as he had tried before—and once again he had failed.

Suddenly, in a hoarse voice he said:

'I beg you to act with honour and give Raine a chance to recover from what has happened recently. I have nothing more to say, so good-bye.'

'Good-bye, and leave things to me. I'm not such a bad fellow,' Clifford said with returning good humour.

For he felt now that things were going to be better. He could see Raine in London, and it would only be a question of weeks, he was sure, before he could induce her to defy her family and marry him—before the end of the summer.

20

Armand told Raine, while he drove her to Clifford's hotel, that he had been to see the Englishman.

She looked surprised and a little perturbed.

'What made you do that, Armand?'

He explained with difficulty. There was so much he could not tell her; so many warnings he wanted to make but felt unable to do so.

'I just had to—tell him, myself—that I no longer consider you my fiancée and that I hoped he would give you every opportunity to think this thing over quietly once you return to England.'

'I see,' said Raine in a low voice.

He glanced at her. She looked very tired still, and not well despite her tan. His heart ached for her. Gently he said:

'Don't worry too much, *ma mie*, it will be all right, I am sure.'

'Oh, Armand, I hope so—you've been absolutely wonderful to me and I don't feel I deserve it. One can't go about switching gaily from man to man, you know. I feel so badly about the whole thing.'

He tried to laugh but it had a mirthless sound.

'*Ma chérie*, you can't call it "switching gaily", that is an exaggeration. And after all *our* engagement was only of a few hours' duration.'

'But my affection and regard for you go deeper than that.'

He was happy to hear her say it but somehow it was an empty happiness, this morning.

'You will see how you feel about it all when you have had a chance to renew the old ties with . . . with Mr. Culver. As I told him this morning—you have got to learn to readjust your emotions. It is not easy, after imagining so many wrong things about him, and doubting his loyalty to you.'

These words were dragged from him. The girl at his side had no idea of the difficulty under which he laboured. Her own feelings were mixed; last night she had *thought of nothing but her grandmother. This morning* the Comtesse had managed to whisper the words · 'Forgive me', yet again, and Raine had kissed and comforted her. But even if Gammère made a complete recovery—and Dr. de Vitte thought that she would—endless complications still faced Raine. There would be an unpleasant scene with Mummy, later today. Obviously both Gammère and Mummy would be forced to retire from the contest, knowing they were beaten, because they had been found out. But that wouldn't prevent them from wanting her to marry Armand—and shelve Clifford. It was more than complicated, Raine thought miserably, it was *dreadful*. Mummy would have had two telegrams yesterday—one to announce her engagement to Armand—and one about Gammère's stroke. It would be so awful to have to face her later today and tell her that she, Raine, had decided after all not to marry Armand but to return to London and continue seeing Clifford.

Where was the great passionate love that had threatened to sweep her off her feet months ago? Why *should she care so much what others felt or thought today?* Why couldn't she walk into Clifford's hotel this [illegible] *'Take me back* [illegible]'

[illegible] knew that she still loved Clifford and that she had been immeasurably thrilled to hear that after all he had written; that he did

love her still. Yet things had changed . . . definitely but imperceptibly. Was it because of Armand? She did not know. She almost felt this morning that she would like to run away from both the men and hide.

A pale, subdued Raine sat on the hotel terrace under a striped umbrella, beside the tall fair man who was so unmistakably English in his well-cut grey flannels, and wearing a carnation which he had picked and put in his buttonhole. An enormous bunch of carnations wrapped in cellophane lay on the table waiting for her. Clifford had, of course, known that she was coming. And he was being very clever and a little more subtle than usual—playing the right tune on her heart strings.

He was devastated, he said, when he thought he was not going to see her again, and absolutely thrilled that she had come. He had postponed his journey till tomorrow.

As he had told her last night, he repeated that the whole thing had been a shock, finding that she had never received his letters (and so on). And worse still—discovering that she was about to celebrate her engagement to the French architect. Hastily, Clifford added, that he thought 'de Rougement a fine chap'.

'He did the right thing of course, not binding you to him knowing how much we still love each other, my darling.'

Raine sat silent. She felt very sad this morning—and it was a deep and inexplicable sadness, even though Clifford's strong warm hands covered one of hers. Even though it was wonderful to hear his rich caressing voice again, and to see those amazingly blue eyes of his looking at her with all the old appeal to her senses. But why was it that she was haunted by the ghost of Armand? Armand, her friend and counsellor. Her brother—and her would-be lover. The person who had stood staunchly by her side through all her troubles and made life possible for her during the long weary weeks in Candella while she still waited for news from Clifford.

'Oh Cliff,' at length she said, 'I feel awful. I've hurt Armand *so* terribly, you know.'

Clifford frowned but controlled his impatience.

'Yes, of course . . . bad show, that. Pity I didn't arrive twenty-four hours sooner. Damned awkward, the whole thing. But he knows—as well as we do—that you gave your word to *me* before you gave it to *him*, and you gave your word to him only because you thought you had lost me.'

She nodded. 'Yes, that's true, but it doesn't make it any better.'

He pressed the slender fingers.

'My sweet, you're all upset and no wonder. You've been too long in that gloomy old place, Candella, alone with your old grandmother and de Rougement. He's a good fellow and all that, but much too serious—and no sense of humour.'

'I wouldn't say that,' began Raine loyally.

He covered up:

'Well, anyhow, none of them there seem particularly gay, and you were made for laughter as well as love. Oh, my sweet Raine, I want to carry you off away from them all. We used to have such fun. Do you remember . . .?'

He began to recall to her mind some of the meetings they had had . . . the dances . . . the stolen thrilling hours . . . the passionate kisses . . . their whole exciting, gorgeous love-affair. He ended:

'You and I were meant for each other. Armand is just a fellow you've been thrown back on—a sort of rebound affair. But you're *mine* and I'm the only man in the world who could really make you happy. I really understand you, my darling.'

She listened, half-thrilled, yet [illegible]—wondering if what he said was strictly true. *[illegible] happen* she cried within herself.

Something had gone . [illegible] perhaps the old complete [illegible] in Clifford [illegible]

haps her confidence in *herself*. She could not, no matter how hard she tried, feel positive this morning that she had turned to Armand only because she was lonely and disappointed. There had grown a very real and sweet devotion between them. His artistic side . . . the man who was both painter and poet . . . genuinely appealed to her. That side which Clifford did not possess; Clifford who adored cars and athletics and parties. She had always thought she would learn to like them for his sake and ask for nothing else but to share his life with him.

A deep and renewed resentment against the mother and grandmother who had come between them and spoiled the pattern, bubbled up in the girl again. She could not bear all the indecision. She knew that if she was asked a straight question at this moment: '*Which man do you really want?*' she would have found it hard to answer. Clifford had come back into her life, and she did not want him to leave her again. Yet neither could she coolly and callously turn her back on Armand.

Suddenly she took off her sun-glasses and put the back of her hand against her eyes.

'I think I really must get away from everybody for a time and think this out alone,' she whispered.

Clifford felt suddenly anxious.

'Darling,' he said, bending near her, 'darling, don't say that—I've only just found you again, I couldn't bear to lose you. Oh, darling, I wish you'd fly back to London with me today.'

'Cliff, darling, that's out of the question.'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Very well—then get your mother to bring you over quickly. We can meet every day. Spend all our spare time together and prove to her that we have no intention of giving each other up.'

'I can't leave Candella until Gammère is better. I think she might die if I walked out on her now.'

'Well, look what she did to you . . .' began Clifford.

Raine interrupted, her face white and set, her eyes hardening.

'She did it from the best motives, and I love her very much. I wouldn't want her to die through *me*. You can't ask it.'

[illegible]

lat ,
feel inclined to leave you behind where you see de Rougement every day.'

'Seeing him every day will make no difference to my feelings for him or for you, I assure you.'

'But you can understand how jealous I am. My God! you don't know what you mean to me—how terrific it is to have you back.' He spoke with a passion that convinced her and he was even convinced, himself, that he meant it, and that if he could marry Raine in the end, he would let Lilias go willingly. But he was swimming in deep waters and he might drown if he didn't take care, he reflected grimly. The last letter he had had from Lilias was pretty passionate. He didn't want any trouble from that quarter.

'Raine,' he added, 'swear that you do believe in me now—that you won't let this interception of our letters destroy your old love for me. I *did* write you know. It's a bit hard on me, all this. . . .'

He looked so boyish and unhappy and reproachful in that moment that her heart warmed to him. With a surge of the old fond feeling she pressed his hand. Her eyes grew beautiful and soft. She looked wistfully at the red-gold of his hair and the magnificence of the broad shoulders and long, fine body. She saw his gaze wonder to her mouth. The very look was as physical as a kiss and quickened her pulse-beats. She was still in love with him, she thought . . . *she must be*. . . .

'Oh, Cliff darling . .' she whispered.

'You do love me?' he asked eagerly.

'Yes.'

'And you'll come back to London as soon as you can?'

'Yes.'

'And you'll marry me . . . you *will* marry me, my heavenly heart?'

'*Yes. . . .*'

She had said it. She used to say it again and again in the old days and rejoice in the utterance of that one word of affirmation. Yet this morning it sounded flat. The essential vital core of love seemed to be missing in her. She only knew that her first loyalty was to Clifford, and that the sad ghost of Armand de Rougement must be banished for ever . . . if she was to keep faith with any man . . . *or* with herself . . .

'*To thine own self be true*' . . . Shakespeare had written those words. She understood now, for the first time, the vital urgence of them.

So she qualified that 'yes'.

'But give me time to think. . . . I don't want a definite engagement just now to any man. I want just to go on seeing *you*. But please don't be angry with me, be patient, Cliff,' she begged.

He felt frustrated and annoyed that he could not achieve a more definite result. But no amount of argument or persuasion on his part could alter her decision. So, he thought, furiously, he must hover between these two girls in his life and be 'pushed around' all on account of the confounded money. He took care, however, to be as charming and sympathetic to Raine as possible.

'I understand your point of view absolutely, my darling, and you will find me very patient,' he said; 'the only promise I intend to drag from you is that you will not be coerced by your family—or de Rougement—into an engagement with *him* before you see me again.'

She gave a faint laugh then, but her eyes were enormously sad and troubled.

'I can give you that promise, Cliff darling. No engage-

ment would be possible now. Everything is far too confused.'

'This time you will write to me and I to you, and I shall expect you back in London in a week or two's time. Is that right?'

'Yes,' she nodded.

'Will you stay and lunch with me?'

'I can't, darling,' she said in a low voice; 'I've got to get back to Candella. I can't leave Gammère just alone with the nurses. The poor darling is frightened by what has happened.'

Clifford would like to have said, *'To hell with "the poor darling"'*. But he nodded his head and murmured:

'Of course. Please give the poor old Comtesse my deep sympathies and ask her to try and receive me in the future as a would-be admirer and friend, rather than an outsider who is trying to grab her granddaughter. Tell her that as far as I am concerned she can alter her Will and cut you out. I shall still want to marry you.'

Raine did not know that those words were uttered out of sheer bravado and that Clifford would have been a very sorry man this moment to find himself landed with a wife who had no prospects. But they parted on the best of terms, and there were tears in Raine's eyes when—in a corner of the hotel lounge, empty at this hour—he took her in his arms for a brief moment and kissed her goodbye.

They embraced silently and passionately. Then, with sincerity in his voice, Clifford said:

'I love you so much, Raine. Come back to me soon'

She clung to him for a moment. She felt strangely frightened because the embrace for her was sensuous yet bereft of all joy—as though his arms—his kiss—drew response from her body yet nothing from her heart.

She felt in the same frightened, lonely mood when her grandmother's chauffeur called for her and drove her back to Candella. Armand had wanted to take her but she had refused. He had let fall the fact that his Chief

had an emergency job for him to do in Nice and she was not going to interfere with Armand's work.

She was utterly exhausted in mind and body when she reached home and walked into her grandmother's room. The nurse met her with an anxious expression.

'I am glad you have come back, *Mademoiselle—Madame la Comtesse* is very restless and speaks of things which I do not understand. I think she needs you.'

The girl seated herself by the big, splendid bed which looked so strange with a white embroidered spread neatly drawn across it instead of the usual lovely brocade. And Gammère looked shrunken and unhappy instead of her old charming witty self. As Raine drew one of the slender old hands into hers, she knew that she could never have hated Gammère for long. There was too close an affinity between them. They were so alike—proud, impulsive, and fierce in their passions. She understood what remorse Gammère was feeling, and because she could not bear her to suffer, bent over her now and spoke to her as tenderly as though there had never been a rift between them. She spoke in French, which language she knew the old lady preferred.

'Dearest—most beloved—how are you?'

The Comtesse's dark eyes which had been so tormented, grew suddenly content. The thick whisper that came from her was clear to Raine.

'Better. More feeling . . . can move my foot . . . not dead yet. Can't kill a de Chagny easily.'

Raine swallowed hard.

'I know, dearest. I'm a de Chagny, too!'

'Where . . . is . . . Cl-Cl . . . She did not finish the name but Raine finished it steadily for her.

'Clifford? Going back to England. I've sent him away. No . . . don't struggle to ask me things. I'll tell you. He has agreed that we should wait and see what happens in the future. When you are better, I shall go home with Mummy and decide.'

The look of relief that crossed the Comtesse's find old face was very revealing. She thought: *'How they hate him—Gammère and Mummy. Poor Cliff!'*

Their hatred saddened her yet curiously enough did not foster in her the old flame of hot resentment and de- [illegible]

she believe it—or was it just her fancy—but the right side of Gammère's face seemed less distorted. Oh, thank God the stroke had been such a mild one! Adrienne de Chagny, old though she was, was fighting every inch of the way; not yet ready for the Angel of Death who had spread his dark wings for one terrifying moment over *Candella last night. Today the rustle of those wings was* less distinct. Life was still pulsing through the frail body. The invalid spoke again; Raine bent to hear.

'Don't . . . cancel . . . *announcement in papers.*'

'What announcement?' began Raine.

'Toi . . . et Armand'

Raine caught her breath

'Gammère, I don't want to be engaged to anybody for the moment.'

The Comtesse's face worked.

'Raine . . . *mon enfant,* I beg you . . he has grown like a son to me . . . a grandson . . I want you to be happy . . . I will make up for stealing your letters. . . . But Raine, *Raine* . . . do not break Armand's heart.'

It was the old impassioned Raine then who cried out: 'You would all rather break mine!'

Yet, even as she spoke, she felt that subtle inexplicable change within herself . . heard a deep inner voice that whispered:

'Are you quite sure that you would not be heart-broken if you lost Armand for ever?'

21

Rose Oliventt sat by the open window in her daughter's bedroom, fanning herself with a folded newspaper.

It was five o'clock. An hour ago she had arrived from England, panic-stricken by the telegram that had recalled her to her mother's house. Although she had never been close to the old lady, she loved her after her fashion, and greatly respected her. The news of the sudden collapse had been a shock.

She had seen and spoken with the Comtesse, and now—for the last half-hour—had been arguing with Raine.

Raine, wearing a short-sleeved, flowered cotton wrapper, lay on her bed, a handkerchief soaked in eau-de-Cologne across her throbbing temples and over her closed eyes. She had been resting here in the darkened room trying to get rid of the worst headache she could remember. Then her mother had come in, flung open the shutters and started this argument. So like old times, Raine smiled grimly, although every nerve in her body seemed to be jumping in protest.

Poor Mummy! So anxious to do the right thing and *be* correct . . . and so tactless. She seemed to have no human impulses at all, the girl reflected wearily. Everything Mummy did was well thought out, looked at from the right angle; all her emotions—if any—were pigeon-holed and controlled.

The natural panic Rose Oliventt had felt in London when she first knew about her mother's stroke, had long since been disposed of. She was now her well-composed

practical self. There would be no more chaos at Candella with Rose Oliventt in charge. She disapproved of the French day-nurse and meant to talk her mother into having an English one. She wasn't sure Dr. de Vitte was tackling things the right way. She would send for a specialist from Paris tomorrow. Hélène was being stupid and hysterical. The whole staff needed controlling. Everything had gone to pieces in Rose's absence. As for Raine . . . well, there was little to be said for *her*. She was just a little fool who did not know what was good for her and never had done. Mrs. Oliventt had been so delighted, she said, to receive that first telegram announcing Raine's engagement to Armand. True, he was not quite the match Mrs. Oliventt had hoped for, considering Raine had been the most beautiful débutante of her day. But he was of aristocratic birth and breeding, and both clever and *good*. Raine would have money, and Gammère adored Armand. So it would all have been splendid. Then—to hear that Gammère's stroke had been *caused by the untimely arrival of that dreadful Clifford* Culver . . . well . . . how *could* Raine have been so wicked as to upset the poor old lady who had done so much for Raine all her life? Why couldn't she have sent Clifford about his business instead of rushing off in that scandalous manner just as she was about to receive her ring from poor Armand?

Mrs. Oliventt's cold disapproving voice drone d on. Raine listened with dull apathy. She did not even resent the things her mother was saying. She thought: '*When one has suffered oneself one grows tolerant of other people. Mummy appears hard and cold but I know she is frightfully upset by all this so I must be patient.*'

But suddenly it grew too much. Raine pulled the handkerchief from her eyes and glared angrily at the older woman. Instinctively she noted how cool and tidy Mummy looked—even on a hot day like this, after a long journey. Rose brought 'London' with her right into this

room—wearing that well-tailored grey silk suit which toned with her hair and the smart white pancake hat in which she had travelled and not yet removed. She was very good-looking, yet such an alien to Candella, the girl thought. It was just as though she had never been born a de Chagny and had no niche in the old historic, romantic place.

'Mummy,' said Raine, sitting upright, 'I think we had *better put an end to this conversation.* Perhaps you don't know yet *why* I behaved in what you call a scandalous manner. Perhaps Gammère hasn't told you? But I don't think *you* have any right to reproach *me.* I, by rights, ought to be reproaching *you*, and some girls in my position would never speak to their mothers again after doing what you did.'

Rose Oliventt changed colour. She tilted her head higher.

'Oh, yes, I admit Mother and I had no right to keep your letters.'

'It was disgraceful,' said Raine in a low voice.

'All the same it was essential we should put an end to the affair between you and a man whom we know to be a cad and a fortune-hunter.'

'You know nothing of the kind, Mummy, but *pour l'amour de Dieu*, do not let us go through all this all over again. Just get this clear—you did something very wrong and you don't seem to realise what havoc you've caused. Gammère knows that I have forgiven her and I am quite willing to forgive *you*, but not if you are going to make life intolerable for me.'

Mrs. Oliventt stood up. Glancing at herself in a mirror, she straightened the collar of the *guipure* lace cravat at her throat. The trembling of her fingers was the only sign of her inner agitation. She would never have admitted it, but she had had a few very bad moments once she knew about Clifford's arrival here, and realised

that she and her mother had been found out; failed in their scheme to separate those two.

She loved her daughter, difficult though she found her. Raine was so utterly different from herself in temperament as to breed this unfortunate continual antagonism. And Rose still regretted that she had not brought into the world a nice easy 'pudding of a girl' like her niece, Jennifer. Raine's exceptional beauty and character made her impossible to deal with. But she could see that she would have to yield a few inches or she would never get anywhere with Raine. So she turned, and walking to the girl's side, spoke to her with a meekness she rarely showed.

'Raine, my dear, I do owe you an apology about those letters; I admit it. We were wicked old women to deceive you. But we were desperate. We were both so certain that if you were parted from Mr. Culver long enough, you would realise that he was *not* all you thought him.'

Raine moved uneasily and avoided her mother's gaze. She muttered:

'Oh, all right, Mummy. Let's call a truce. It's much too hot to fight and with Gammère lying so ill, we mustn't think of anybody but her.'

Mrs. Olivent drew a chair up to the bed and continued on a soft note:

'You look very seedy, my poor darling. It's all been too much for you to bear.'

'I'm all right; it's only a rotten head.'

'Stay in bed and I'll bring your supper up—just like I used to when you were a little girl. Do you remember how you used to get into "states" and we'd have a scene, then you'd cry your eyes out and I'd send you to bed and bring you your favourite supper?'

Raine's own face softened. She could see that her [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

sweet to me. Thanks awfully, Mummy, but it's much too

hot to stay in bed tonight. I'll come down and dine with you.'

'And will you forgive me, dear—about the letters?'

'Yes.'

Mrs. Oliventt cleared her throat, drew a pearl-headed hat-pin from her hat, took off the hat, and smoothed her smartly-groomed grey head. She felt better. And now she was filled with curiosity to hear details of what had actually happened last night. Her poor mother's speech was so blurred, she hadn't been able to explain fully.

Patiently, Raine submitted to a cross-examination.

She found that she could speak of Armand with tenderness, and some remorse. He was a darling and she hated to distress and disappoint him—so much she admitted to her mother; but, after all, her first loyalty must be to Clifford. Their separation had been brought about by circumstances beyond their control. They still loved each other and . . . but somehow she could not go on talking about Clifford. None of it seemed to ring quite true. She felt cold and afraid—of herself—of the future. Of everything.

Then Mrs. Oliventt, watching her daughter closely, said:

'You realise that I had already sent the announcement of your engagement to *The Times* as I was asked to do, when I got your first telegram?'

Raine bit her lip.

'You were very quick, Mummy.'

'I wanted to be—I was so very pleased. You won't ask me to cancel it, will you?'

'I would prefer not to announce an engagement to any man, really. I tell you, Mummy, all this has upset me so much that I just don't know where I am.'

Those words caused Rose Oliventt inwardly to rejoice. But for once she was tactful enough not to betray satisfaction. She said:

'Well, it may be too late to cancel it of course. But we

can, if necessary, deny it later on. One often sees: *"The marriage between so-and-so and so-and-so will not now take place"...'*

Raine suddenly turned her face to the pillow. She could bear no further discussion. She felt that she was 'being got at' on all sides And she had left her grandmother earlier after having been forced from sheer pity and sympathy to promise that she would not banish Armand altogether. Not until she was one hundred per cent sure that she meant to marry Clifford, anyhow.

What ought she to do? She just wanted to be left alone, Raine thought in despair.

Her mother bent and kissed her.

'There! I am not improving your headache, dear. I'll go and have a bath and change. Is Armand coming tonight?'

'I believe so,' said Raine with an effort. 'Gammère asked that he should.'

'Yes, there is great devotion between those two, it's really very sweet,' said Mrs. Oliventt with a smile of some significance. Raine saw it and thought:

'I feel as though I am being hunted... hounded... as though something in me will go snap in a minute if they don't lay off.'

She gave a great sigh of relief and shut her eyes again as her mother closed the door after her.

But she was beset by her own thoughts. They crowded in like winged creatures whirring round and round through her tired mind. Faces, too. Clifford's face paramount—so handsome and vital; with the gleaming hair and the blue eyes that used to make her senses swim. Clifford, most compelling and masterful of lovers, dominating her existence, begging for her total surrender. Then, Armand . . . the fine pale poetic face of the young Frenchman. In a curious way, it was more mature than Clifford's. There was so much wisdom in the large dark eyes—such a healing quality in the mere touch of

his hand. Both men came to haunt her and appeal to her. The one full of the pride of possession and his masculine power. The other, so much more *spiritual* and melancholy, yet . . . she had seen those dark eyes full of fire and felt those fine lips crushed on her mouth in an ardent, all-desiring kiss. And she had thought for a few carefree hours that she would take him for a lover and a husband and live with him one day here in Candella.

Almost, she found herself wishing that Clifford had not come back.

'I must stop thinking and worrying or I shall go mad,' she decided.

She got up, took a cold shower, put on a thin dress of dark blue organza, and went downstairs. She wore no jewellery and had only touched her lips faintly with rouge. She had no heart for dressing this evening. She still felt ill and tired. What a contrast from last night, when she had walked down these same stairs radiant in her white evening dress and wearing Armand's roses. The rest of those roses, which Hélène had placed on a table in her bedroom, were dead. Raine had looked at them, and thought they were a symbol of the misfortune that had overtaken Candella. They had shed their petals in the great heat and lay in a scarlet desolate pool upon the carpet.

Down in the hall, Hélène met her young *Mademoiselle* with a telegram in her hand. Raine opened and read it. It had been sent from the airport in Nice.

Come to London and to me very soon shall be waiting. I love you. Cliff.

Only the faintest thrill lightened her gloom. She crushed the piece of paper in her hand and thought bitterly:

'Now, now *when it is almost too late* . . . they let me have my letters and telegrams!'

In the middle of dinner, she was given a letter which had been sent by special messenger from Cannes. She excused herself to her mother who was eating dinner with her, and opened it. This was from Armand.

She knew a sudden disappointment because he had decided not to come tonight after all. On the other hand what she really wanted was an early bed and sleep. She read the letter carefully. It was written in French:

Très chère, it began,

I did say that I would come to see you but I beg to be excused I've only just returned from Nice and I have a very bad headache. . . . (Here Raine smiled wryly, they all had headaches tonight, and no wonder.) . . . *I did mean to come but in a way I feel it is best you should be left tonight in peace. You need repose, my poor child, you have been through so much. I would not add to your worries for an instant if I could help it. But before I sleep I must write this letter and let you know that whatever you decide I shall accept—and if the decision is in the other man's favour—I shall not complain. You owe me nothing. No matter what you may think or feel, as I told you when we met this morning, your engagement to me was not binding. It was a sudden impulse on your part, when you believed that Clifford had deserted you. Now that you know he has not, it is only natural that you should want to go back to him. I understand and I shall never reproach you Le bon Dieu knows that I am grateful for every hour I have been privileged to spend with you—for the wonderful moment when you permitted me to kiss your lips and feel that you were mine—and in particular for your friendship and the confidence you have shown in me. It may be difficult for me to see you any more, for the present, anyhow. I love you too much. And when Madame la Comtesse is better—which please God will be soon—I shall beg her to release me from my work at Candella There are other architects*

better than I. Unless, of course, you decide to return to London, and then I can carry on. (Here Armand had written something which he had scored out heavily, as though regretting it). The letter ended with the words: *I shall pray from the bottom of my heart for your happiness, most beloved Raine. You must always remember that it is that happiness which is so important to me.*

Your devoted
Armand.

Mrs. Oliventt glanced across the table at her daughter. She was surprised and a little concerned to see tears running down Raine's cheeks. Mrs. Oliventt laid down her knife and fork.

'Darling, have you had bad news?'

Raine shook her head; folded the letter and put it in her lap. She wiped away the tears, and made pretence of continuing with her meal. What a letter! Could any man have written a more beautiful and generous one, she thought. How adorably he had behaved. He had taken his *congé* and stepped aside for the man whom he believed she loved, with complete nobility.

She felt that she did not deserve all his kindness. Far from bringing her relief, this letter seemed to stir up, anew, all her frightful doubts about Clifford.

As for Armand not seeing her any more and resigning from his work on the restoration of the monastery—that was unthinkable.

'I won't answer the letter,' she thought. 'I'll go into Cannes and see Armand, myself, tomorrow. I shall tell him that he must come back here whatever happens or it will be the end of Gammère.'

(*Was that* the only reason? Or was it that she would miss him so abominably if he stayed away?)

Hélène came into the room with cheese and fruit.

'So much disturbance at your meal-time, *Madame*

and *Mademoiselle*,' she grumbled; 'a telegram, a letter and now, a visitor.'

'A visitor—who?' asked Raine.

'We can't see anybody tonight, Hélène,' began Mrs. Olivcntt in her sharp way.

Hélène, who did not like *Madame*, tossed her head and turned to Raine :

'But the visitor is for *Mademoiselle*, and she says that it is important.'

'What name does she give, Hélène?' asked Raine.

'She is from Cannes. A Madame Yvonne Thibault,' the old servant answered

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'Who on earth is she?' asked Mrs. Olivent.

Raine said that she had not the least idea but had better go and see. She did not want any more food.

Hélène had put Madame Thibault in the library. Darkness was rapidly falling. The two huge electric candelabra on wrought-iron stands at either side of the stone fire-place had been switched on. They shed a golden light upon the elegant book-lined room.

Yvonne Thibault had been walking up and down with nervous, restless steps; disinterested in the books, although mindful of the elegance. It was her first visit to the famous converted monastery but the name 'de *Chagny' was one familiar to anybody who lived in Cannes*. Yvonne could not help being impressed by these surroundings and half regretted that she had dared to come here. But her last futile attempt to regain Armand's affections had had such a bad effect on the neurotic young woman that she had felt driven, maddened by her jealousy, and determined to revenge herself in what manner she could . . . if only to wreck Armand's chances with the Comtesse de Chagny's granddaughter. When Raine entered the library, the French girl glanced at her sharply and with some surprise. Raine looked ill and pale and had dressed carelessly. She did not present a particularly glamorous spectacle to Yvonne who judged all women by their *chic* in costume and *maquillage*. With an inward sneer, she decided that it must be the de

Chagny money that Armand was really after. How else could he want to marry this thin, colourless English girl? She was immature—uninteresting.

Raine looked inquiringly at the ultra-smart Yvonne and wondered who this ostentatious young person could be with her flaming red hair and painted face. Handsome in a way but little better than the poor imitation of a Hollywood film star.

'Madame . . ?' began Raine inquiringly.

Yvonne advanced with a glittering smile.

'You must forgive me if I intrude, *Mademoiselle*,' she said in her own language, 'but I have rather urgent need to speak to you.'

Raine drew forward a comfortable looking arm-chair.

'Please be seated, Madame,' she answered courteously in the same language.

Yvonne sat down, crossed her legs and opened a cigarette-case which she handed to Raine.

'No, thank you,' said Raine.

'Then if you don't mind *Mademoiselle* . . .' said Yvonne and lit the cigarette which she had put into a long ivory holder.

Raine stared. What an extraordinary creature! What possible business had she here at Candella? Who and what was she? She might be a *vendeuse* from one of those exotic shops on The Croisette.

Then Yvonne, blowing a curve of smoke into the air, said:

'I am afraid that you will not like what I am here to say, *Mademoiselle*.'

Instantly Raine's muscles tautened. She became aware of danger....

'Pourquoi, Madame?'

'We have a mutual—*er*—*friend*—in Monsieur de Rougement. *Armand*.'

Now at the sound of that Christian name so intimately

spoken, Raine's heart started to beat quickly. She linked her hands behind her back in a nervous way.

'Of course,' added Yvonne, 'I know he is more than a friend to *you* because I saw in the local paper this morning the announcement of your engagement.'

'Yes,' said Raine with some difficulty, 'that is possible.'

'I am afraid I cannot congratulate you, *Mademoiselle*.'

Now Raine's teeth bit into her lower lip.

'You are being mysterious and extraordinary, Madame Thibault. Does Armand know that you have come to see me?'

Yvonne gave a derisive laugh and flicked the ash from her cigarette into an onyx ash-tray on the table beside her.

'Far from it—he would be exceedingly displeased if he knew.'

'Then may I ask why you have come and exactly who you are?'

'I am the woman, *Mademoiselle*, that he should, if he behaved with honour and decency, be marrying in your place.'

Raine's brain, already over-tired and puzzled—could hardly take in the full significance of this statement. But she felt the sudden necessity to treat this unwelcome visitor with extreme caution. Her own natural dignity came to her aid. She drew her slim figure up to its full height and tilted her chin proudly as she said:

'Madame Thibault, I do not know what you are trying to tell me or—what you think you will gain by telling it; but I am afraid I shall not make a good listener. I do not wish to hear any more. In the normal way, as a friend of Armand's, you would be welcome to this house. But after what you have just said, I must ask you to leave.'

Now Yvonne took the cigarette-holder from her lips and stared at Raine's pale young face in genuine amazement.

'You mean you don't want to *hear* what I have to say?'

'I do not.'

'But, *Mademoiselle*, you don't understand. . . . You are deceived if you imagine that Monsieur de Rougement is a good man. He is a bad one. Like you, I loved and trusted him only to be let down in the most treacherous manner because he found that a marriage with you would be more lucrative and . . .'

'*Madame*, I am not prepared to hear more,' cut in Raine sharply. But her heart was sinking, sinking, and her eyes closed for a moment as a spasm of pain and despair contracted her whole being.

Was this true? Was she, Raine, to be yet further disillusioned in men . . . forced to believe that Armand owed a debt to this painted, vulgar young woman which he had failed to pay? It was a staggering blow . . . for Raine had thought that she could at least believe in Armand; that he was different from other men She had placed him on a pedestal; regarded him as noble and of unimpeachable integrity. A man who had the right to criticise the failings of his fellowmen; in the way; for instance, that he had criticised Clifford.

Before Raine could speak again, Yvonne sprang to her feet and laying aside all pretence at civility and control, started a tirade of accusations against Armand.

He had seduced her . . . he had broken all his promises . . . she had flown for refuge to a good man in Paris and married him; even then Armand had written to her and asked her to return to Cannes where he could see her. Then, when she returned, he had told her that he was going to marry the English *demoiselle* who was the heiress to Candella.

'Oh, yes—he told me that he didn't want to see me any more as he had pulled it off with you,' Yvonne continued viciously, 'but he begged that I should remain in Cannes so that he could go on meeting me. He knew that I could give him the warmth and passion he could

not expect from a *convenable* English girl like yo
and . . .'

'*Madame—please!*' Raine broke in with hot pr
sick to the soul.

Yvonne went on:

'*Alors!* I didn't think it would be right to let you m
him until I'd told you what he was like. It wouldn't
fair to such a nice girl. You would soon find out wha
hypocrite he is and . . .'

The shrill voice damning Armand with French inv
tive reduced Raine almost to a state of hysteria. Fin
she put her hands against her ears and spoke violentl
her turn.

'Get out . . . you dreadful woman . . . get out of
house!'

Yvonne, scarlet and in the grip of one of her fien
tempers, saw suddenly what she had done, and burst
tears.

'Have pity on me, *Mademoiselle*,' she pleaded, 'I
Armand so much! And I am sure he still loves me.
cannot marry him, knowing this.'

Raine's hands dropped to her sides. She was shive
Never in her life before had she been subjected to su
humiliating scene. She looked with horror and disgu
the weeping woman in front of her. She could not be
hear another word. She could not even believe half
Yvonne had said. At the same time, the awful fac
into her consciousness that Yvonne had destro
absolute faith in Armand. *There is no smo*
fire . . . so they said . . . so there must be *so*
this unpleasant story which the French wom
folded. She must have had *some* sort of aff
mand.

Almost, Raine could have laughed in
They had called Clifford a fortune-hunte
just another? Yet she would have stake
sincerity of his affection for her.

She said, suddenly, hoarsely:

'Please go away, Madame Thibault. I assure you I shall remember what you have told me. And I assure you also that my engagement to Monsieur de Rougement no longer exists—but for reasons other than those you have just given me. Now you must leave. I am not very well and I do not wish for any further discussion with you.'

Yvonne dried her tears, dabbing carefully at the mascaraed lashes. She felt that her attack on Armand's character had fallen strangely flat. She was both puzzled and intrigued. Why should the engagement have been broken, when it had only just been announced? Perhaps the English girl had had a quarrel with Armand. Not over *her*, Yvonne; but something else. Well, that suited Yvonne and there might be a chance now for her to regain her old status with Armand. She started to speak again but Raine walked to the door and opened it.

'Good-bye, *Madame*,' she said stonily.

'I hope you will forgive me, *Mademoiselle*,' stammered Yvonne, taken aback and feeling decidedly out of place.

It was not until Yvonne had actually left the house that reaction set in with Raine. Refusing to answer her mother's questions about the visitor, she went mechanically into her grandmother's room to say good night to the invalid, then locked herself in her own bedroom.

Her brain was in turmoil. She kept seeing Madame Thibault's sneering, made-up face and hearing that shrill voice denouncing Armand. There was a thickness in Raine's throat. She thought:

'I've had about as much as I can take . . .'

Yvonne Thibault had come like a snake and spat out her poison and whether the things she had said were entirely true or not—they had blotted the shining page on which Raine had written the name of Armand as her particular *Chevalier*.

Young though she was, Raine knew life; knew that

excuses could be made for a young man in France who lived alone and might conceivably have formed a passionate attachment with some girl although without serious intention. Besides which, it would not be fair to judge Armand until she had asked him about Mme Thibault and heard his side of it. And she was still sure enough of him to feel that he would have a suitable explanation. Certainly, nothing would induce her to believe that he had been carrying on an amorous intrigue with Yvonne at the same time that he had laid siege to *her* heart.

But Yvonne's visit had left a nasty taste in Raine's mouth. It had come on the night when, more than at any other time in her life, she needed to retain her ideals, and feel her confidence in mankind restored.

She looked out at the night. It was without stars or moon and there was the sinister threat of a storm in the air. The odour of syringa, and of the tobacco plants which Gammère had planted just below her window, filled the air with pungent sweetness. But the burden of doubt and sorrow in Raine's youthful soul was almost past bearing. Tonight she did not know what possible adjustment she could make to her emotions nor find a way out of the maze in which she was trapped.

On the one hand Clifford seemed to be waiting faithfully for her as he had always waited. Yet earlier today she had felt that she could not go to him because she could not walk out on her dear Armand. Now when another woman had laid prior claim to him, Raine had experienced the feeling of startling, inexplicable but quite definite *jealousy*. She had hated that French woman—not only because of her ill-bred exhibition but because she had announced that Armand belonged to *her*; and still wanted her.

Raine turned, walked into her room, flung herself down on her bed and hid her eyes against the pillow.

Why, *why* should she care about Armand and the other woman?

If she still loved Cliff and meant to marry him, why worry whether Armand loved her or not? His past could not concern her, and nor would his future. To wish him to remain faithful to her for the rest of his life even though she did not wish to marry him would be intolerably vain and cruel

Yet—Raine's thoughts sped on—she knew, too, that she could not bear the idea that there *was* another woman in Armand's life. She began to cry hopelessly. Surely all this feeling in her for Armand could not be completely platonic . . . nor could it be merely because her *amour propre* had been upset by Yvonne Thibault's revelations.

Unable to face another hour of lying here, sleepless, Raine dried her tears, found a silk-fringed Italian shawl which she threw over her shoulders, and walked out of the monastery.

Her mother had retired early and was probably already asleep, for there was no light to be seen under her door when Raine passed. The only lamp that still burned in Candella was the one in Gammère's sick-room where the night-nurse dozed or knitted.

Raine walked quickly out of the house and up the road that led to Grasse. There had come a sudden suffocating heat that hung like a blanket over the mountains and encompassed the girl as she walked up and up towards the lights of Grasse. From the distance echoed the sullen roll of thunder. Now and then a lightning flash lit up sky and earth with terrifying brilliance. Yes, thought Raine—there will be a storm She did not care She was not afraid of storms She even welcomed the idea of one as a diversion—a mood in tune with her own wild, turbulent feelings.

Now as the starless midsummer night grew darker and the storm-clouds banked closer, the rain came down in

great spattering drops. One or two cars passed Raine's slim figure, for it was not yet midnight. An old peasant, wearing *espadrilles*, carrying a basket, and with a mongrel at his heels, passed and called out to her in guttural *patois*: '*C'est bon* . . . the good rain'; tomorrow, he added, they could collect snails and sell them to the restaurants where *l'escargots* were a gourmet's dish. The rain brought business to the snail-vendor.

Raine bade him good night and he added:

'Hurry home, *mon enfant*—the storm is coming.'

She did not hurry nor did she dream of turning back. But suddenly she seemed to be plunged into a vortex. Lightning flashes zigzagged across the cloud-torn skies, the thunder rolled and reverberated in deafening orchestration. Raine was drenched and panting by the time she reached the top of the winding road. Exhausted by the long climb and her own emotions, she stopped and wiped the drenching rain from her face. She was conscious now of feeling first hot, then cold, as though with fever. Possibly she had a fever, she thought dully. It used to attack her out here in the Midi when she was a child. She would run quite frighteningly high temperatures. She decided to turn back and began to descend the steep route again towards St. Candelle. It was still raining hard, but the violence of the storm was abating. The thunder rolled more faintly, the temperature had dropped. It was cooler.

A ragged man with a beard, and with a sack over his head, suddenly got up out of the ditch and approached Raine and called to her. She did not understand what he said. She did not even recognise the language. But his appearance frightened her, and she became suddenly aware of the folly of being out alone on this road at such a late hour, and in a bad storm. No wonder they thought her crazy at home!

The man lunged at her, and she turned and ran as for her life. She rushed down the hill, terrified that the tramp

was following. Now she tripped into a hole in the road, fell forward, cut both knees and lacerated her hands, trying to save herself. The blood poured down. Her heart pumped as though she were dying but she ran on and on—gasping for breath, crying.

She hardly stopped until she saw the familiar splendid outline of the monastery of Candella, and the light burning like a beacon from Gammère's window.

Somehow she managed to get into the house, shut the front door and bolt it like one who has had a nightmare and is trying to escape from it. She stumbled up the stairs with a pain in her side and her torn legs and hands bleeding profusely.

A moment later, the night-nurse came out of the Comtesse's room to make herself some coffee, and found Raine lying, unconscious; half-way up the staircase.

With a cry of alarm, the good woman ran to Rose Oliventt's door and knocked on it, calling to the English lady to come quickly. Rose appeared, and terrified at the sight of Raine's dripping form, helped the nurse carry the girl to her bed. She then sent the nurse to rouse old Hélène. She must get the cook's son to go at once for Dr. de Vitte.

Mrs. Oliventt knelt by Raine's bed and chafed one of the ice-cold hands, moved from her customary composure to tears.

'Raine, Raine, my darling child . . . where have you been? What in *God's* name has happened?'

Raine opened her eyes. She looked without recognition at her mother and murmured a name.

'*Armand.*'

The name did little more than perplex Rose Oliventt still further. Albeit she took it as a good sign that even if delirious the girl called for Armand and not for that *other....*

But later on, all that Raine muttered, was quite unintelligible. When the doctor arrived, having hastily thrown

a coat over his pyjamas and driven through the storm from Mougins, he said that *Mademoiselle* was in a high fever and that he found her pulse-rate quite alarming.

So then, until dawn broke—it was Raine, and not her grandmother, who needed the close attention of both doctor and nurse. They worked together to bring that dangerously high temperature down.

23

When Armand reached the offices of *Maçon Frères* that morning he was handed a personal message by one of the assistants. A Madame Oliventt from St. Candelle had telephoned and wished to see him at Candella immediately.

'Are you sure it is not Mademoiselle Oliventt?' asked Armand quickly, but the young man assured him that it had been *Madame* who phoned.

With some concern, Armand sorted the morning's post on his desk, took from a drawer a blue-print of Candella which he wanted, and told his assistant that he would be back later on.

He drove through a sparkling country-side. After the storm and the drenching rain, everything looked so much fresher and greener. The fragrant earth steamed in the hot sunlight. The sky had returned to its former stainless blue. But Armand felt depressed as he drove along the familiar route which he had traversed so many times during this last year. He did not really want to see Raine; it all hurt too much, and he wished to God that the poor old Comtesse had not so impulsively and quickly telephoned the local newspaper office about her granddaughter's engagement. It had become public news at once and it was exceedingly painful for Armand to be warmly congratulated by his friends in Cannes and Nice, when his chances of marrying Raine were now so remote

He turned into the courtyard of the monastery. The old stones had been well washed by last night's rain. The

pink geraniums looked sorry for themselves, beaten down in the long border. But a clematis spreading over the walls around the kitchens had broken into glorious purple blooms. Two white pigeons sat side by side, deliciously, on top of the portico. Their cooing made a gentle murmur, otherwise Candella was strangely silent this morning. No workmen shouting to each other, no sound, as usual from the younger members of the staff, singing as they washed and ironed, or peeled the vegetables.

It was Hélène who first gave Armand the news of Raine's sudden illness. She was in tears and crossed herself as she spoke to Armand.

'The devil has entered Candella. Saints preserve us, Monsieur de Rougement! All our luck has gone. First *Madame la Comtesse,* and now the *pauvre petite Mademoiselle.*'

Armand lost colour.

'What is wrong with *Mademoiselle?*'

Hélène had no time to answer, but crossed herself again and moved off, muttering. Raine's mother had leaned out of an upper window and called 'good morning' to Armand. Hélène was afraid of Rose's sharp tongue. She hurried off to do her shopping.

Upstairs in the Comtesse's boudoir, Rose Oliventt told Armand as much as she knew.

Armand uttered an exclamation:

'But where had Raine been, *nom de Dieu?* What induced her to go out alone so late?'

'That's what we don't know. It's all most mysterious. She seemed to have some kind of brain-storm. She behaved like a little lunatic. She must have left the house while we were all asleep, then been caught in that ghastly storm. It was a mercy she wasn't struck by lightning. She was frightened by some tramp, too, I know, because she told me so when she recovered this morning.'

'Bon Dieu!' whispered Armand.

'She was drenched—looked like a drowned thing when we found her on the stairs. The doctor and my mother's nurse had to work quite hard with ice-bags and drugs and so on—to get the fever down. It was one hundred and five degrees, at one point. I know the thermometer is different in your country, but you can imagine—since our normal temperature is ninety-eight point four degrees.'

'Bon Dieu!' repeated Armand.

'Then, when she started to babble in a delirious sort of way, she called for *you*,' finished Mrs. Oliventt, who looked tired and older than usual, this morning.

Now, Armand flushed to the roots of his hair. Rose Oliventt felt a sudden affection for the young man who loved her daughter so tenderly.

'Yes,' she added. 'Raine seemed to want you, but we did not send for you because she eventually slept and the doctor thought it best to keep her as quiet as possible. It was alarming, but never really critical. Raine used to be subject to sudden high temperatures even as a child. The one thing against her being in the South of France in summer is that here she is far more prone to these queer attacks, particularly when there is thunder about.'

'She is very highly strung,' said Armand.

'On the other hand, I *think* something *especial* happened to upset her,' went on Mrs Oliventt. 'She won't tell me, I can't get a word from her about it. But she had a visitor—a lady from Cannes—last night, and afterwards, when I saw Raine again, she looked quite ghastly. She had, I may say, just received your note which touched her greatly.'

'Thank you, *Madame*,' said Armand in a low voice. 'And who was the visitor?'

'A French girl, I believe. A Madame Thibault, if I remember rightly.'

Armand stood rigid. Every nerve in his body had jumped at the mention of that name. The colour rushed

to his face again. Then he said in an almost inaudible voice:

'*Yvonne Thibault?*'

'You know heér?' asked Mrs. Oliventt curiously.

'Yes,' said Armand, with difficulty; 'I know her.'

He spoke calmly but inwardly was a raging furnace of fury, of resentment. So Yvonne had carried out her threat to come to Candella and make trouble! How scandalous, how abominable! And what in the name of heaven had she told Raine? A tissue of lies, most likely. . . . Scurrilous accusations against him that would have distressed poor little Raine.

He said:

'*Madame*, I beg you to allow me to see Raine for one moment—only one moment, but it is essential. Will you trust me?'

Rose Oliventt put a hand on his arm and patted it in a motherly way.

'My dear boy, of course. But don't stay long because she is weak with the fever; still quite ill. I have made up my mind to take her back to London as soon as she can travel and we can leave my mother. Dr. de Vitte is convinced that the Comtesse will recover rapidly now. Each day she has more movement in her limbs and speaks more clearly.'

'*Grâce à Dieu*,' muttered Armand, but in this moment his thoughts were more upon Raine than his beloved patroness.

A few moments later, he stood beside Raine's bed. The nurse had discreetly moved into the adjoining bath-room, and waited there.

Armand's feelings were indescribable and almost too poignant to be borne as he looked down at the girl whom he adored. The shutters were drawn and the room dim; redolent of Raine's own familiar fragrance. She lay there against her big square pillows, looking extraordinarily small and child-like with her short dark ruffled hair

her pale young face devoid of make-up. Two hectic pink spots showed on the high cheek-bones. One of the hands he took felt hot and feverish. The big grey eyes looked up at him in a dazed way but she managed the faintest smile.

'Armand . . . *bon jour* . . . I didn't expect . . . *you*. . . .'

'*I had* to see you,' *he said huskily*

'Sit down for a moment, please'

He seated himself gingerly on the edge of the bed, clinging to that small hot hand as though to an anchor. He said:

'Raine, my dearest child . . . what is this all about? What drove you to take that senseless walk in the storm last night?'

The big tears gathered on Raine's lashes and rolled down her cheeks. She whispered.

'I was so . . . unhappy.'

'But I thought you had made your decision quite happily, and that you were looking forward to going back to London to . . .'

'To Cliff?' she finished for him, still whispering 'Yes. I thought so, too. And I still think I *must* see him again and give the whole thing a fair chance. But last night I also felt as though it was the end of the world for me. In a way, it's flattering to *you*, Armand, because once I thought so highly of you.'

His heart knocked. He could not bear that past tense.

'You mean you no longer think so?'

'I don't know. I don't even feel that I care much . . . about anything, or anyone.'

'But that is all wrong, and quite unlike you,' he said quickly. 'Please tell me exactly what Madame Thibault said to you.'

Raine caught her breath.

'You know . . . that *she* came . . .?'

'Your mother has just informed me.'

'Then you must know . . . what she had to tell me'

'No, Raine. Yvonne Thibault is capable of saying things that are a long way from the truth. *I* intend to tell *you* the truth. Whatever else I have done in my life, I swear before God that I will never lie to *you*.'

She acknowledged those words by a nod of her head. How tired and weak she felt this morning! Empty of all feeling . . . as though every emotion had been drained out of her heart. She had not meant to see Armand any more, yet now that he was here she felt strangely comforted. The faith that had been partially destroyed by Madame Thibault, was returning—Armand's very presence here seemed to renew her confidence in his integrity.

She wanted to cry—to smile—to be sensible—to be foolish. She did not know *what* she wanted—so she lay there with her hand in his, quietly weeping. And she listened while he told her about Yvonne Thibault.

'What she did was unpardonable,' he finished, 'but it was done out of insane jealousy. She was always like that and it was because of that, we originally parted.'

'You—did—love her once?'

'As a young man who is lonely and loves a pretty girl who is in love with him—yes,' said Armand with a faint regretful smile.

'I understand,' nodded Raine.

'You are really extraordinary!' he exclaimed, and bent over her hand and kissed it.

She gave a weak laugh.

'There's no need for a lot of drama and nonsense. Surely it is only in melodrama that men and women rush away from each other saying "I believe the worst and I never want to see you again". I didn't like Madame Thibault, quite frankly, and I was prepared to hear your side.'

'Nevertheless, you doubted me?'

Raine shut her eyes. He found the gleam of tears on those long silky lashes most disturbing, and wished pas-

sionately that he had the right to gather that frail young figure in his arms and kiss her tears away.

She said:

'What I didn't like was when she said that you had asked her to go on seeing you even after your engagement to me.'

'That was a gross lie,' he said indignantly. 'I have been doing my best to get rid of Yvonne ever since she returned to Cannes. I realise that it is only my word against hers but . . .'

'Don't go on,' broke in Raine. 'Naturally I believe *you*. Women can be such cats. Especially disappointed ones.'

Again he bent over her hand and this time his own eyelids stung with hot moisture.

'Raine, Raine, I can never thank you enough, and never love you enough, whatever happens. I have no *right to love you any more but I do. Pour l'amour de Dieu*, choose what is best for you, *mon petit cœur*, and don't go on harrowing yourself.'

'I'll try not to, but it's all very difficult. I'm still in an absolute maze.'

'Your mother says she is taking you back to London quite soon as your grandmother is so much improved.'

'Yes. Then I shall see Cliff, and afterwards I think I shall try to go away on a cruise round the world or something,' she said with a smothered laugh, while the tears continued to roll weakly down her cheeks.

'*Eh bien*. Get away from all of us and give yourself plenty of time to think.'

'I feel better now that I have spoken to you,' she whispered. 'You know, Armand, I just couldn't bear to have you topple off your pedestal.'

He looked quite shocked.

'For heaven's sake don't put me on one again. No man

in her, as she looked on his face this morning, she felt that her main impulse was to throw herself into his arms and be kissed as he had kissed and comforted her before. *She was almost afraid of London—and of Cliff*. But she had a strong sense of duty; a loyalty to the old love that made her feel it imperative that she should get away from Candella—and Armand. Her family had done Cliff a great wrong by intercepting his letters. It would be equally wrong of her to walk out on *him* just because she had been allowed to doubt him unjustly, and grow fond of Armand.

Armand pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed at the tears on her cheeks.

'You look like a funny little girl, and I adore you,' he said, then covered her hands with kisses and left her, because he could not trust himself to stay a moment longer. But, glancing back at her over his shoulder at the door, he added : 'Let me know how you get on, and *be happy, mon tresor.* If you need me—I shall be here.'

She was still crying when her mother joined her later. But the nurse, taking her pulse, announced that it was more normal, and that *Mademoiselle* was already very much better.

Raine did not see Armand again before she returned to England with her mother. But she was not surprised to find how much she missed him. She was tempted on several occasions to send for him. But she resisted, knowing that it would not be fair.

By the beginning of August, Gammère had so far recovered fron her stroke that she was able to be carried downstairs and she began to speak almost normally again. But the attack had taken its toll and the old lady looked particularly frail, although she behaved with her usual courage; that indomitable will that had brought her through two world wars. She reluctantly agreed that in the circumstances it might be best for her beloved granddaughter to return to England. The Comtesse had cor-

responded with Armand and told him that it was her dearest wish that he should resume work at Candella, and *Maçon Frères* had arranged to complete the restoration, and recommence the work at the end of the first week in August. So that meant that Armand would be back at Candella then. Raine wished to go away before he came. It was a bitter blow for the old Comtesse that the girl would not recognise any engagement to the young Frenchman, but on that point Raine was adamant. Gently but firmly she reminded both her grandmother and mother that *they* had been instrumental in snapping the old thread of romance between Clifford and herself, so they must not grumble if she thought it only right to give him another chance.

Adrienne de Chagny could do no more than accept this decision with resignation. But as she kissed her granddaughter good-bye on the day that Rose and the girl flew back to London, she whispered :

'Come back soon—to me *and to Armand.*'

Raine did not answer. She was quite well again physically but incapable of making any major decision. She only knew, as she sat in the great Elizabethan air ship that carried her and her mother thousands of feet above the mountains, that leaving Candella caused her a deep sadness. And that not even the thought of meeting Cliff at the other end (and she had wired him that she was coming) could make up for the pain of leaving France—and *Armand.*

24

Clifford sat in his car, smoking. He had pulled up on the side of the road in Kensington Gardens beside the Tea Pavilion. He was waiting for Raine to join him. It was one of their old favourite meeting-places. She used, as often as she could get away, to take a taxi from Knightsbridge and join him here. On this August afternoon, when the late sunshine was dabbling the green leaves with gold, and gleaming on the Serpentine, London was lovely and not too hot. But Clifford loathed it. He had just driven through the slow-moving traffic from Theobalds Road and thought he had never seen the Park look worse . . . only a few odd stands, fast being broken up, left to remind one of that gay Coronation week. Everybody who was 'anybody' was out of Town—even Lilias Fitzbourne who was at this moment driving with her father and aunt down to the Italian Riviera.

Sheer necessity forced Clifford to stay in London during August. He had to work, and he was up against more competition than he liked to admit. In addition, he had had one or two singularly trying meetings with poor Lilias before she left Town. She had been *dragged* away by her family and from him, Clifford thought with his usual conceit. And how she had cried! He had never seen the big blonde girl so upset. In this very car, in Richmond Park where he had taken her for a farewell picnic, she had implored him to try to get away and join her in Portofino where Lilias and her aunt were spending the main part of their month's holiday. Mr. Fitzbourne had important business in Rome.

Of course Clifford had told her that he couldn't possibly go to Italy; but he had promised to wait the year

[illegible]

these days. He had had no idea until recently how emotional she could be. Now he had to go through it all again with Raine. Women were such unexpected creatures, and dangerously feline, he decided. One never knew when the claws would appear under the velvet paw. But Clifford had no intention of being scratched. The main thing to do was to keep the two girls apart, and it was most fortunate that now Raine had returned, Lilias had gone away.

He had not long to wait for Raine. He flung away his cigarette and, as he saw her jump out of the taxi which she paid, and walk towards the Jaguar, he was a little shocked to see her looking so thin. That grey shantung suit with the pleated skirt positively hung on her. But she could never be anything but beautiful with those magnificent eyes, and he liked her large white hat with the graceful fringe around the brim. She was, as ever, very elegant. He really must speed things up and get her to the altar without further delay.

'Welcome back to London, and to *me*, my heavenly heart' he murmured as he opened the car door for her.

Seated beside him, she allowed him to take her hand. She pressed his in response. But her lashes fluttered nervously as she saw the warmth in his eyes. He looked as handsome as ever—dressed, like herself, in grey, and wearing the sort of well-tailored shirt, and matching silk tie and handkerchief, that made him always such a debonair figure.

'I can't tell you what it means to me to get you back,' he added. 'Don't let's stay here. Let's go farther afield where I can really be alone with you for an hour.'

She nodded. She seemed to find it hard to speak, as

though she felt overcome. And as he turned the Jaguar around, out of the Park gates and down Kensington High Street, she felt altogether strange. It was like years instead of months since she had last sat in this car beside him. He had not changed, he said. So she must believe it. But in those old days she had experienced a swift and passionate reaction to every fresh reunion with him. On top of the world—ready to defy that world for his sake—flying the banners of a gay, brave love.

Coming over to England, in the air this morning, she had thought of Clifford, and resolved to meet him without prejudice. To put the memories of France and Armand behind her. But too much had happened to make that possible. She could only be sure of one thing; that she still found Clifford handsome and charming in a way that no woman could fail to find irresistible.

While they drove along, and he steered the car out of the traffic and over Putney Bridge and the busy river, Clifford did most of the talking. It was, perhaps, a little heartless of him, he thought, to take Raine to the same place where he had so recently brought Lilias. But there were so many delightful secluded places for parking one's car in Richmond Park.

He questioned Raine about her flight—and talked about nothing in particular until they were right away from the crowd. He even asked quite politely after the health of M. de Rougement. And that, curiously enough, was the one time that Raine felt her heart beating at all fast. But she answered coolly:

'He is well. He was truly marvellous about the whole unfortunate thing—and in the face of what has happened to us both.'

'I must say I was extremely annoyed by the notice that appeared in *The Times*, of your engagement. A lot of our set have been coming up to me and asking if I knew.'

Raine stared stonily ahead of her. She was still very tired and disinclined to argue or analyse. During lunch

her mother had begged her not to see Clifford but she had insisted. Now she wondered if Mummy had not, for once, been right. She couldn't get anything into proportion—it was all *too* close, and events were crowding down upon her far too rapidly.

She felt all her reactions to be mechanical until Clifford stopped the car under the green shade of some trees, and then, as no one was in sight, took her in his arms.

'Darling . . . *at last!* . . .' he sighed rapturously.

She allowed him to hold her and kiss her for a moment. His lips were urgent and demanding. His fingers ruffled her hair, caressing the nape of her neck; it was the old expert love-making which she used to find so madly exciting. For an instant she forced herself to blot out all thinking, and to respond on a wholly physical basis. She could not have fallen so completely out of love with him, she decided. It was just that she was not feel-

head, she said in a frantic little whisper :

'Make it all as it used to be . . . don't let me lose you . . . Cliff, *Cliff*, darling . . . *make me love you again!*'

He was too lacking in sensitivity to recognise the real despair that lay behind that cry. He took it for granted that she was just over-*emotionée* . . . (typical of Raine!). But she was very sweet, and there really was something precious and enchanting about Raine which he found lacking in Lilias Fitzbourne Besides—there was a genuine desire in Clifford to do as Raine asked—to revive their old passion for each other absolutely. He covered her face with kisses and said every lovely thing to her that he could think of. Magnanimous, generous sentiments that he might not have expressed in a more cautious moment.

faithless that he had even so much as taken another girl out to dinner. Anyhow, he had never wanted to marry any other girl in the world. He quite understood what it must have been like for her, at Candella, and what had driven her to become engaged to de Rougemont. Jolly decent fellow, Armand, and all that, but the engagement must be denied. He, Clifford, was madly in love with her and could not wait for her coming-of-age.

'We must marry now, at once,' he ended imperiously. 'We will make your mother understand that what she has done has only brought us closer together. Raine, angel, look at me. Tell me that you will let me get a special licence, and marry me at the end of the month. Your mother will have to give her permission. She'll *have* to.'

Raine drew away from him. The moment of passion had passed. It had neither comforted her, nor filled the void in her heart. It was as though she was left spiritually famished and physically, very slightly repelled. Those few moments of hot kisses given and taken, which had left the man triumphant and anxious for total surrender, had revealed to the girl one outstanding fact. *She was not in love with Clifford any more.* The old memories, the old affection and friendship were still there, like silken invisible cords joining them, but the vital link was missing. The key to her deepest, most sincere emotions had been lost. Where or when would she find it again? Would it be in time restored to her by Clifford if she were patient? Or was it Armand who held it, even now, back there in Candella? Strange how she could actually smell in this very moment the strong scent of the ripening grapes in Gammère's vineyards and hear the sound of the *Provençaux* singing—the hammers echoing through the monastery. Armand would be directing their labours. Or in his studio, perhaps, painting. And he would be feeling sad and lost; she knew it. Both he and that grand-

mother who had behaved so badly but who was still so adorable in her sight, would be lonely, missing her.

Clifford touched her hair.

'Sweetness—what is it? I haven't heard you tell me what I want to know Will you marry me at the end of this month?'

Then she swallowed hard and looked him straight in the eyes.

'I can't, Cliff,' she said.

He was staggered by that direct and simple answer and stared at her open-mouthed.

'But *why not?*'

'I just can't rush into anything I was too hasty be- [illegible] Armand;

[illegible] cause you didn't really love him. But you *do* love me'

She averted her gaze. Her cheeks burned. Nervously she took a compact from her bag and wiped away the rouge he had smeared at the corner of her mouth. Then, smoothing back her hair, she looked at him and said:

'I don't think you understand'

'No, I can't say I do.'

She thought:

'Armand did. He understood absolutely, and advised me to go away.'

She was becoming gradually aware of Clifford's egotism. It had not affected her in the past, but it struck her today forcibly. He tried to draw her back into his arms.

'Darling, don't be unkind. It's been weeks and months since we were so happy together, and then your family stepped into the show and did a lot of harm to us both. But you're not going to make me suffer for that, are you? You're not going to tell me that your love [illegible]

like winged creatures buzzing and circling crazily through her mind, knowing no respite.

'Cliff, do *try* to understand,' at length she said. 'One can't just go back and pick up the old threads when so much has happened in between.'

'Then you don't love me any more!'

'I didn't say so. I'm not going to say *anything* today. I told Armand before I left that I needed to get right away from everybody and sort this thing out. Do be patient—do try to see what has been done to me.'

'I *rather think* you're making an issue of it that doesn't exist,' said Clifford huffily, and pulled a cigarette-case from his pocket.

There was an unhappy silence during which he lit the cigarette and smoked. Stealing a glance at him, Raine saw a deep scowl on the handsome sun-burned face. She was beginning to find out how spoiled he was and yet . . . how could she really be angry or resentful if he took up this attitude because he loved her? She felt strangely humble, because two so different (and so nice), both loved her this way. But she would not admit even to herself, which one she really loved. *Because she dared not.* She felt that it would be too dangerous to take a snap-decision. And it was with all Adrienne de Chagny's stubbornness that Raine reiterated to Clifford that she must get right away and think things out alone.

'I really feel that I don't want to get married at all,' she said with a short laugh.

Clifford made no answer. He felt furious and frustrated. And positively damp in the palms at the thought of all his pressing creditors and what was going to happen in his life if he could not pull off a match with one of these débutante heiresses. What the *heck* was the good of them all being in love with him, and weeping over him, and merely increasing the burden of his debts because he had to spend so much money in the pursuit of their love, he asked himself with brutal cynicism.

Raine was distressed, and she put a hand over one of [illegible] pressed it gently.

[illegible] up- [illegible]

'I don't know that I'm awfully keen on being stood up side by side with your Frenchman and then told which skittle you intend to knock down,' he muttered.

Raine went scarlet.

'What a beastly thing to say!'

'I'm sorry,' he said quickly, and pulled her hand up to his lips. 'I'm just damned miserable because I want you now, and I don't want to wait, and I don't like to think there is anybody else in the offing.'

The unpleasantness of that other remark had shocked her but she forgot it and softened again.

'I'm sorry, too, Cliff—I'm being a horrible bore to everybody, but I just cannot and will not be forced into marrying in a hurry. I don't *want* you, or Armand, to wait for me. I told him so and I tell you the same.'

Aghast, Clifford said:

'But why this sudden change? When we met in the South of France you were terribly pleased to see me again and to hear the truth about our correspondence. You *wanted* to come back to me. What's happened between then and now?'

She put her face in her hands.

'I don't know. Honestly I can't think. I don't understand myself, so I can hardly explain to you.'

He was terrified that the prize he so ardently desired was slipping through his fingers.

'Raine, Raine, don't walk out on me now. I just couldn't stick it. I went through a bad time when I first imagined that you'd stopped writing to me. It was hell. Then I saw hope again! Don't take that hope away now —Raine—for God's sake, darling—don't you realise how much you mean to me?'

She felt dizzy. There was that other man, too, who had

also sworn that he could hardly bear to live without her. (Oh—love was becoming a burden almost too heavy to be borne.) She felt like a ship swamped by this over-burdening of love, slowly sinking.

'I do thank you, Cliff, with all my heart,' she whispered, 'and I know I've changed and that it's all my fault. But perhaps one day I'll feel as I used to. This will pass. Please, please don't be angry and unsympathetic. Forgive me. Let me have a little more time.'

He saw that it would be useless to argue further and that if he did not give her the sympathy she asked for, he would only antagonise her. He made an effort to smother his annoyance, his genuine fear of losing her, and told her that it should be as she wished.

'I'll wait for you till Kingdom-come and I'm not going to be afraid of the Frenchman or anybody else. I *know* you belong to me and that all this will pass as you say. You'll come back to me in the end. You poor little soul—you've had rather a packet lately, and it's been too much for you!'

His kindness moved her more than his passion. It was the old impulsive Raine who hugged him now.

'Thanks, awfully, Cliff. It's dear of you. And I hope—like you—that everything will be all right.'

'You don't intend to go back to France?' he asked jealously.

'No,' she said in a low voice.

'Well, I must be thankful for small mercies.'

She gave a miserable laugh.

'I feel spoiled and stupid, but I'm sure I'll be more sensible once I'm of age. I seem to have made a mess of things since my coming-out as a deb, don't I, Cliff. I'll start again from my birthday in November and try to make a success of life.'

Clifford threw away his cigarette-end with a vicious flick of the wrist.

'For heaven's sake don't tell me I've got to wait u

'Then you have still got a little love left for your Cliff?'

She nodded, yet felt strangely guilty after she had done so. For if she had really delved into her soul and asked herself why it was improbable that she would meet and marry another man, she would know that it was not because of Clifford. Not because she had a 'little love' left for *him*. But because of the young architect whom she had left behind at Candella.

A sudden nostalgic vision of Armand smote her consciousness . . . the thin, brown-faced young man so essentially French with beret on his head and white shorts and sports-shirt, and the dark glasses shielding his eyes from the hot sun of the Mediterranean. Armand, in his shabby little Renault, driving with her through Mougins, down to the sea. Armand, lying beside her on the beach—or laughing with her as they swam in the warm blue water. Armand in the studio, painting her, looking at her with his grave brown eyes. Armand, white and strained and tense, renouncing his claim to her—*for her sake.*

'*Be happy. Just be happy*,' he had said in farewell.

She shivered suddenly and turned to the man at the wheel.

'Take me home, will you, Cliff?'

'It's all been frightfully unsatisfactory from my point of view,' he said, as he switched on the engine, 'but if this is how you want it, darling, I must give in.'

'Nothing is as I want it. But it is as I think it ought to be.'

He gave her a moody look. The inexperienced little débutante had grown up a hell of a lot since they first went around town last spring, he thought. Had the fellow in France anything to do with this alteration in her—or was it just that she feared being rushed into matrimony? *Damn those two women*—her grandmother and her mother—for interfering with the post. They had succeeded better than they imagined, in putting a barrier up

between Raine and himself. But he tried to be charming and understanding as he drove Raine back to Knightsbridge.

'I refuse to eat my heart out from now until October. I shall just take it for granted that you'll come back to *me*, my pet. And this time there will be no one to destroy our letters, so I'll be a good boy and write to you every day, if you like.'

She gave a nervous laugh. But she was relieved that he was no longer trying to force her to say *Yes*. It was positively frightening that one could change so quickly, she reflected, but it seemed fatal to try and recapture old thrills. She *did* still care for Cliff; but not nearly enough to make an immediate marriage, even with the full consent of her family.

Maybe, she thought, *I* shall change again in time. I can't trust myself to say 'yes' or 'no' while I'm in this state. It will be better once I get right away Perhaps by the time I've got to Salisbury, I shall feel terribly anxious to come back to Cliff again.

He tried to extract one more promise from her as he kissed her good-bye in the car at the entrance to her block of flats. A quick embrace that brought neither of them much joy.

'At least give me your word of honour that you won't walk out of my life until you've seen me again and given me a final chance.'

She hesitated, then with a faint sigh, gave him that promise.

Yet it was with relief that she left him and let herself into the flat. She heard the voice of her great-uncle talking to her mother in the drawing-room. Uncle Miles was just the one person in the world she wanted to see and be with. And at this particular moment, she meant to beg him to book their seats on the plane to Salisbury just as soon as it was possible for him to arrange the long journey.

25

'I doubt, my love, whether I have ever seen you look so well, and I'll swear you've put on a stone since we left London,' said Miles Oliventt.

Raine laughingly protested.

'Uncle, *please* . . . if I'm as fat as all that, I must go on a strict diet once we get home.'

'Nothing of the kind. This craze for slimming is a great mistake on the part of you young people—you look very lovely, my dear. Stay just as you are. I'm writing to your mother this morning to tell her all about it.'

Raine sat back in her basket-chair. They were breakfasting on the terrace of the beautiful villa just outside Salisbury, where she and her great-uncle were the guests of General and Mrs. Orlanger. The General had been at Eton with Miles Oliventt. Mrs. Orlanger was twenty years younger and a charming friendly woman who had made Raine feel at home from the time she arrived, which was over six weeks ago.

Raine, finishing grape-fruit and coffee which a smiling black servant had just served under the umbrella that shielded them from the brilliant sun, shaded her eyes with her hand for a moment. She looked with pleasure, as she had done daily ever since she came here, at the beauty of the distant majestic mountains. They appeared to be quite blue in the radiant morning light. The garden was a blaze of colour. The scarlet of the 'flame of the forest', the huge exotic zinnias, and the many species of orchid grown in the open by Ruth Orlanger, looked almost un-

real, Raine thought, with a background of glossy palm trees.

She loved Rhodesia. She found it a beautiful, stimulating place with a perfect climate. Much about it, of course, reminded her of St. Candelle in the summer. But on the whole the South of France—and certainly the British Isles—and her old familiar life, seemed very remote.

She had not been given much time for thinking or brooding since she arrived in Salisbury. The General had interests in a gold-mine at Que Que and, almost immediately, the four of them had left Salisbury by train and followed the same route taken by the Queen Mother and the Princess when they visited Rhodesia a short while back.

Raine. Ruth Orlanger had, of course, been primed in advance about Sir Miles's great-niece coming out here to recover from an 'unfortunate affair'. But Raine never discussed her private affairs with her hostess—charming though she was. And neither did she appear unduly anxious to get back to England. Sir Miles, himself, did not know how Raine was feeling about things—nor did he question her. He thought it best to leave her alone. But he did know that a great many letters came for her both from London—and from Cannes. And that she on her part did quite a lot of writing. But she seemed calm and even happy, and took a deep interest in their long and rather tiring journeys

However, in his mind she was much less nervy and depressed—and this putting on weight was a good sign And at a big Ball in Bulawayo, given by wealthy friends of the Orlangers, Raine had scored a great success. She had looked exquisite and danced every dance. He had wondered at times if she had lost her heart to any of the

good-looking healthy young Rhodesians who eagerly claimed her time and attention.

But Raine seemed to remain aloof from them all. Tranquil as well—but aloof.

Nobody but Raine knew the inner hunger she had been feeling ever since she came to Rhodesia—for one of those two men she had left behind. A hunger of the heart —for *Armand*. And for Candella. *Never for Clifford.* She knew now that she must break with Clifford; that she could not love him again in the old wild way. She belonged to Armand, to his country, his way of life, there in St. Candelle—with Gammère.

She had not yet written to tell Armand so. She did not find it easy to write the final letter of farewell that must first be sent to Clifford. She had been writing in a non-committal, platonic fashion to both the men. Every time she came back to the Orlangers' villa from some excursion, and picked up her mail—she found a pile of letters from Clifford. All passionately assuring her of his love and fidelity, his eagerness to get her back. The very urgency and intimacy of them seemed to make her feel embarrassed these days rather than flattered; sorry that she had ever been on such terms with him. The old love was quite definitely as dead and cold as the ashes of a burnt-out fire—never to be revived.

No love-letters came from Armand. He wrote only once a week and then as a friend; telling her bits of news about her grandmother, the monastery and, sometimes, about himself. The letters ended always with an assurance of his life-long devotion—but asked nothing of her. Only Clifford's were written in posessive vein; arrogantly sure of himself.

Raine had found herself searching at times, in vain, for one single expression of passionate love from Armand; knowing now that she had been away so long from him that she *loved him*. *Really* loved him; and that it was to him she must return. *If he still wanted her!*

That, now, was her anxiety . . . in case Armand should have grown tired of waiting and turned, perhaps, to his old girl-friend . . . or found a new one. After all, she had not bound him to her. He was free to choose and in one of his recent letters he had suggested rather plainly that he was preparing himself to hear that she meant to marry Clifford Culver in the autumn.

That is how I want it, if it is for your happiness, he had written.

This paragraph had flung her into a panic. She had written back hastily to tell Armand that all ideas of marriage to Clifford—or anyone else—were still far from her mind. She had laboured over that letter—feeling the growing flame of desire to write quite differently; to tell him that her voyage to Rhodesia and long separation from him had elucidated things and shown her where her real heart lay. Yet she was, in a queer way, afraid to make a binding, irrevocable move. She had not yet forgotten the mental chaos that had followed her over-impulsiveness of the past.

But as the Rhodesian golden days sped by and she grew physically fit (not indeed fat, but rounded and perfect), her longing for Armand increased. She merely skipped through Clifford's effusions They seemed to ring false. But she treasured every word that Armand wrote. And every word that came from Grammère, or her mother who was still at Candella, giving her news of Armand. All seemed well. The work, under Armand, was almost completed. Gammère was walking again, with two sticks nowadays, instead of one, and speaking clearly, with much of her vigour restored

Raine read and re-read such lines from Gammère as:

Armand is his old delightful self and has done a beautiful painting of Hélène—quite an old master. But he looks thin—and is far too serious. I fear he is still very much in love with my Raine. . . .

Those words had made Raine's pulses throb as though on fire. *Still very much in love with her.* Oh, wonderful thought! She must put an end to the affair with Clifford. She had delayed long enough. And yet . . . she hesitated to hurt him, if he was sincere . . . poor Cliff!

She had a bright idea this morning and expounded it to her great-uncle.

'Couldn't we take a boat home to France first—instead of England? So that we could pay a visit to Candella and Gammère; then you and Mummy and I could go on home to London. Wouldn't that be fun?'

Sir Miles grumbled a little. He had the passage all booked and arranged for the second week in October. He could, of course, cancel it and with the General's influence no doubt they could be accommodated on a liner that would get them to Villefranche. But why?—he asked Raine—suddenly taking off his sun-glasses and staring. He actually saw her bite her lip and avoid his gaze, and she muttered that she had just 'thought it would be nice'.

Then the old man who had loved Raine ever since he first held her, as an infant, at the font—for he was her godfather as well as her great-uncle—hid a pleased face behind his newspaper. Of *course* . . . what an old jackass he was! . . . That young French fellow whom Rose and her mother wanted Raine to marry was the reason. By gad, it was a good sign. She didn't want to go back to London—but to the other chap.

'Well, well—I'll see what can be done, my love,' he said.

Raine, her heart beating faster than usual, said:

'Oh, *thank* you, Uncle Miles!'

The Orlangers' head-boy came out on to the terrace. White teeth shining in his ebony face, he handed a letter to Raine.

She opened it. It was from her grandmother—more brief than usual and had to be read slowly and carefully

because the fine slanting French handwriting had grown shaky since the Comtesse's illness. But what she had to say was of such moment to Raine that she sat quite still, staring, her heart pounding.

I thought my dearest child that I should tell you that although I have known this for a few weeks (Armand asked me not to pass on the news until he was sure), I ought to tell you now it is confirmed. We are all grieved here that we shall soon be losing Armand from the district. Maçon Frères have asked him to represent them in a French-Canadian firm of architects which they are financing. It is an important thing for Armand and full of prospects. When he asked my advice, your name came up. He made it clear to me (although not in actual words) that he has no hope of ever getting you back because he feels you mean to return to London and marry Clifford Culver. But he did say that he feared that it might prejudice your outlook if you thought he was continuing to wait and hope, so he has accepted the post. He flies to Canada—Quebec—on the 17th October. I think he is writing to you before he goes....

Raine read no more . . . she hardly noted the final paragraph in which her grandmother expressed her frank sorrow that the young architect should be passing out of all their lives.

For a moment Raine watched the bright-winged bird fly from the top of one date-palm to another, uttering a strange jarring cry. Somehow the unaccustomed sound made her very conscious of the fact that she was here in Southern Rhodesia, far, *far* removed from Armand and Candella. And he was going to Canada. He had given up hope—and he was going right away; deliberately separating himself from her

'Oh, *Armand* . ' she whispered the word breathlessly and sprang suddenly to her feet. Her mind was in chao

again. Peace was destroyed. Clifford's last confident letter had reminded her of her promise to go back and see *him* before she made a decision. Dear life! If she kept that promise and did not first go to France, she might lose Armand *for ever*. And she knew now definitely that that would break her heart.

'Uncle Miles!' she exclaimed. She was trembling. 'What is the date?'

He glanced at the paper.

'This is two days old, my love, so it nust be the twelfth of October.'

She put her hand against her lips and her eyes widened.

'The twelfth—' she repeated. 'And Armand flies to Quebec on the seventeenth. Oh, *Uncle Miles*, what am I going to do?'

26

Armand was packing. Already, one large light-weight case suitable for air travel was full, and had been shut and labelled. The second, lying on the bed, he was not getting on with quite so rapidly. He was not feeling too well. He had one of his bad headaches. He had distressed Mme. Tourville greatly by eating practically nothing during the last forty-eight hours.

Armand's usually calm and well-ordered mind was in something of a turmoil. It was a turmoil into which he had been flung ever since he agreed to leave Cannes and represent his firm in Canada.

He would not be entirely without friends out there. He even had one particular friend with whom he had studied in Paris, and who had married a Canadian girl and settled in Quebec. They were looking forward to seeing him and he expected to arrive in time for the christening of their first child to whom he was to be godfather. But this exile from the Midi and especially Cannes where he had lived so long, had begun to weigh down his very soul. It was an uprooting from the France he adored and in particular, the golden South. Canada seemed such a long way off. Life would be so different there. He would enjoy his work and it was, of course, agreeable to know that he would earn excellent money from now onward, and that *Maçon Frères* had promised that if he did well during the two years in Quebec, he would come back to a directorship here. That sounded magnificent. But the nearer he came to departure the more miserable Armand felt.

He did not really *want* to make money—or even become a director. He wanted to go on with his beloved painting. And above all, *oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* he thought, *above all, I want to look upon Raine's face again!*

He fully realised that he was about to sever himself wholly from her. It was even going to be hard for him to go up to Candella tomorrow, see all the work he had done there for the last time, and bid good-bye to his beloved Adrienne de Chagny.

It had caused him many sleepless nights and much deliberation before he took the serious step. But, as he had written to Raine, he felt it best that he should go. He did not want her to feel any further bound to him. How well he knew that love, and even more so, pity, can become remorseless chains—an emotional drag on the person who could not return such feelings. In his modesty, he believed that Raine still loved Clifford Culver.

The thing that had finally decided him was the unexpected letter he had received from his English adversary. A note had arrived from Clifford a few weeks ago. Armand had said nothing about it to anybody, even the Comtesse. Clifford had, of course, written that letter out of sheer malice and devilment. It was cunningly contrived to shake any belief that Armand had that he was on the winning side where Raine was concerned. It had been in a way friendly; Clifford had thanked Armand for his 'sympathetic acceptance of the situation', and even apologised for the violence he had originally shown him. But it had ended with a description of 'the many letters that poured from Rhodesia into his lap'. Raine wrote almost daily, he said, and seemed eager to get back to London to him again. So he felt it only fair to let Armand know that there was little hope left for *him*. The letter had ended :

Of course this will not surprise you as you know Raine

and I always loved each other before we were so brutally separated.

Those words had reduced Armand to a state of despair, and been shattering for his morale. And since he suffered from perhaps an almost foolish humility, he was quite ready to believe that Raine wished to return to her old love, and count *him*, Armand, out. The letters he had received from her had been charming—but never the outpourings of a woman in love. So he had burnt his boats and agreed to go to Canada. Here he was, only forty-eight hours away from the long flight.

He had just found a snapshot of Raine which had fal- [illegible]

—worn longer at that period—blowing in the breeze, on the upper terrace at Candella. She was laughing (it was the Raine he loved to see) and the photograph must have been taken before he knew her, or even before she had met Clifford Culver. She looked so much younger and happier than Armand had ever known her.

It was bitterly hard to realise that he would not see her again, and must think of her in England, marrying a man whom he could never like nor trust. But she seemed to have made her choice. He knew one thing, there would never be another woman for *him*. He would go on loving Raine until he died.

He put the little snapshot in the wallet which would travel with him.

A less poignant and more unattractive memory of the past had also been revived when he had found a small studio portrait of Yvonne, when he turned out a cupboard full of old papers He had consigned it to the waste-paper basket. He could remember Yvonne with nothing but repugnance.

He had seen her once since her spiteful attack on him-

, when she visited Candella. She had tried to make ace with him but in a few bitter, furious sentences—d he had spoken more harshly to her than to anybody his life—he told her exactly what he thought of her, d warned her to keep away from him in future. He had nded:

'Fortunately you did not make as much mischief as you oped for, as Mademoiselle Oliventt is too loyal and integral to be easily turned from friendship.'

And he had given Yvonne no further chance to make scenes. However, she seemed to have resigned herself to the fact that all was over between them, for soon afterwards, she sold the new business in Cannes and returned to Paris.

So that unpleasant phase in his life was ended.

Strange how tired and ill he felt today, he reflected. He must try and snatch an hour's sleep. The October afternoon was very close. The heat had not yet broken and the countryside was in need of rain. Tonight he was being given a farewell dinner by M. Maçon and his family. He must try and pull himself together.

Mme Tourville knocked on the door. She came in with an armful of freshly laundered shirts and laid them or. the bed. She sniffed, her eyes red-rimmed, as she regarded Armand.

'*Mais, c'est épouvantable!*' she said (she had been saying it for days). 'The last washing I shall do for you, Monsieur Armand.'

Armand gave a faint smile and patted the plump shoulders of his landlady.

'There! I shall write to you and when I return to Cannes, I hope you will let me have my old room again,' he murmured.

Mme Tourville wept audibly, a black-edged handkerchief to her eyes.

'Colette weeps in the kitchen, too. Ah, *mon cher Monsieur*, there are few gentlemen who have been in th

house whom we have found so thoughtful and so kind, and whom we shall miss so much.'

'I shall miss you, too,' he said, and looked around the shabby but comfortable room knowing that he would indeed often wish himself back in this place. He would even long for that familiar odour of garlic from *Madame*'s kitchen and her excellent coffee in the morning; her maternal solicitude for him. He had been here so long. He had been a very lonely young man when he had first come to Cannes. Here, too, he had dreamed his first dreams of Raine. Most nostalgic of all was the bitter-sweet memory of the evening when in this very room he had put on his white dinner-jacket, and prepared with utter joy and a full heart, for the dinner that was to celebrate his engagement.

Madame regarded him slyly over her handkerchief.

'*Monsieur* has not heard from . . . *la petite fille* of the Comtesse de Chagny?'

'Yes,' said Armand and turned away, 'I had a letter from *Mademoiselle* this morning. She will shortly be returning to London.'

'Not to Cannes?' persisted *Madame*. She, better than most people, knew how this *pauvre jeune homme* had suffered. *L'amour* had brought him no happiness—none at all. He neither slept nor ate properly these days. He was all bones, and his eyes were unnaturally big. Ah! it was tragic, for he was a saint!

'Perhaps,' she ventured, 'you will enjoy Canada, *Monsieur*. I shall pray for you ' And now she broke into fresh sobs and hastened from the room.

Her kindness, her obvious distress at losing him, touched Armand deeply. He had been quite overcome last night, too, when Adrienne de Chagny gave him as a farewell present, a very beautiful gold-and-enamel snuff-box which had belonged to her husband—a treasure from the Paris Exhibition of 1870. She had thanked him for his devoted labours at Candella. His

studio, she said, would be shut up, but she hoped that in future years—if she lived long enough—she would see him painting there again.

'You know, my dear boy, that I regret any part that *I* played in bringing pain into your life,' she had ended. 'I had, perhaps, no right to encourage Raine to consider marriage with you. But it was because I was so fond of you—because I *hoped*! . . .'

'I, too, hoped. And I shall remember you with nothing but deepest respect and affection, *Madame la Comtesse*,' he had broken in and kissed the blue-veined hand—always a little shaky these days—which she held out to him.

Even Raine's mother had thawed and shown a softer side when Armand dined at Candella last night. She, too, had expressed her regret over what had taken place. Less subtle than her French mother, she had remarked quite frankly that it was a disappointment to her that he was not to be her son-in-law.

It had all been very painful and not much use. The curtain was coming down slowly but inexorably on this episode in his life, he thought. There remained nothing but regret, and his undying love for his lost Raine.

He packed the shirts that Mme Tourville had just laundered, then flung himself down on his bed, laced his fingers behind his head and shut his eyes.

How his head throbbed! and how restless he felt, how wretchedly indifferent to the life abroad that awaited him. He found some tablets, took one, and closed his shutters. Then he lay down again, praying for sleep.

But he only dozed. He had the strongest and most peculiar conviction that Raine was here in this room . . . not thousands of miles away in Southern Rhodesia . . . but here, looking at him with her wide, grey eyes. He heard her calling to him:

'Armand, Armand!'

Yes, he could swear that he heard her. But he laughed

derisively and told himself not to be an imbecile.

Then he actually slept for an hour, heavily and dreamlessly. He was pulled out of that drugged sleep by the voice of little Colette shrilly calling him:

'*Monsieur, Monsieur Armand* . . . there is an urgent [illegible]

a note. It had been brought by the chauffeur from Candella, she said.

Armand opened it. He had recognised the handwrit- [illegible]

Yes, this letter was actually from Raine herself. And Raine was not in Salisbury. She was in France. . . . *She was at Candella.* There were only a few lines:

Uncle and I flew from Salisbury and landed in Nice an hour ago. I must see you, Armand. All kinds of things have happened. I know things concerning Clifford that I was not aware of until I got here. But I cannot let you go to Canada before I have seen you. Please come. Toujours à toi. Raine.

Armand raised his head. The sweat ran down his thin sun-tanned face. He breathed like a man who has been running. He could scarcely think. But he fastened on that intimate ending to her letter, written in his own language.

'*Toujours à toi*', which in English means 'Always for thee.'

Colette blinked at him.

'There is an answer, *Monsieur*?'

'Yes,' he said, 'there is an answer. Tell the chauffeur

that I will be ready in a moment if he will kindly take me with him, because I sold my own car yesterday.'

'*Oui, Monsieur,*' said Colette.

Then suddenly, to her amazement and her rapture, he seized her in his arms and kissed her on both cheeks. He did the same to Mme Tourville who had come panting up the stairs to ask him if he had good or bad news. And his face was the face of an angel who sees heaven before him.

'She has come back,' he said in a voice of wild excitement. 'Mademoiselle Raine has come back, *Madame*,

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Raine stood in the doorway looking around Armand's own particular studio while she waited for him to arrive. She knew in her very bones that he *would* come. When she had first reached Candella and been told by her mother and grandmother that the young architect was still in Cannes; not due to leave for forty-eight hours; she had experienced the most exquisite relief.

All through the tedious hours of that long flight from Salisbury she had been terrified that she might arrive too late; on account of weather, accident, *anything*. There was so little margin of time left, and see Armand she *must*, before he set out for Canada

She could hardly believe that she was here even now. With a sense of bewilderment she looked around the fa [illegible] su [illegible] o[illegible] been such a rush to pack and leave Rhodesia, and in a fantastically short time, she was in Nice. She felt like a ghost returning here to haunt a beloved and longed-for place. How much she had missed it all, she did not know until she drove from the airport and saw Candella on the mountain-side. Then her heart had beaten quickly and her eyes filled with tears of joyful recognition. She was *home* and *he* could not be far away

She had found Candella unchanged except that Gammère was a good deal better and stronger and her mother appeared to her to have grown more tolerant and [illegible]

tionate towards her. They had rushed into each other's arms as though they had never had a difference of opinion. Hélène and the rest of the staff had come out and wept as they greeted her. It was, as Raine said to Great-Uncle Miles, as though she had been away for years instead of weeks. So touching of them all, and even those two lazy wolf-hounds, Peleas and Melisande, woke up and bounded to her side and almost knocked her down in their welcome.

But here in the studio, she found things sadly changed. Dust lay thickly. Hélène had not come in to clean since Armand stopped using the chapel as a studio. His easel and stool were still here, and the high-backed chair in which Raine had sat for her portrait. But the paintings he most treasured had been covered over, and the whole place had a forlorn, deserted air which struck a chill at Raine's heart.

Quickly she moved forward, took away the dust sheets and opened more of the shutters to allow in more light. There must be no gloom here today. She had told Hélène to let Armand know where to find her. It never entered her head to suppose the car would return to St. Candelle *without* him.

In her new state of certainty—that warm, glad cer-ainty that she loved Armand more than she thought it ssible to love any man, and much more than she had

l blue lavender had been cut. The *rendange* was over. e last grapes had been gathered. Summer was end- ;. Only the warmth remained. The days of the *mistral* d cool winds were yet to come.

She leaned her elbows on the window-sill and looked wn at Gammère's garden, still very colourful, well atered and tended. She could see Gammère sitting in a riped hammock under a canopy. Raine's mother and ncle sat on either side of the old lady. How wonderful o know that Gammère had practically recovered from the effects of that terrifying stroke. Raine's heart failed at the memory of the night when she had seen Gammère fall senseless across the dining-table. Then she fell to thinking of the reason for it all, and that sudden, dreadful transition from happiness to tragedy—because Clifford had come here.

Clifford! The very name sent a sudden shudder through Raine's slim figure. Her eyes narrowed and her pulses jerked with the anger that must always be hers now at the memory of him.

[illegible] her from ruining her life. *But they had been right.*

Yet when she first left Salisbury (how wonderful Great-Uncle Miles had been, in the way he arranged the sudden departure and got those tickets!) she had been filled with apprehension. She had felt guilty because she was breaking her promise to see Clifford, to give him a chance when she first returned from Rhodesia. She had still felt that she owed Clifford *some* loyalty. And these sentiments had remained with her—until they reached Rome.

Their first stop in the journey had been Nairobi where they had changed planes, then on to Rome. In Rome they had had to change again. This time the delay had been long enough to permit them to spend a couple of hours

in the city. Sir Miles knew Rome. As a young man he had held a diplomatic job at the Legation. But Raine had never been to Italy before and took the opportunity to see what little she could in so short a time.

The splendour and beauty of Rome had excited her imagination and made her long to return when her mind was less harassed. It was then that she ran into the Fitzbournes—and Lilias.

A somewhat dejected and bored Lilias had, it appeared, accompanied her father to Rome where he had business connections, and she was returning to the Riviera to complete their holiday on the following day. The two girls—former débutantes and acquaintances (they had never done more than say 'How do you do' in London)—came face to face in the lounge of the Hotel Excelsior.

After the preliminary greetings (affable enough) Raine—feeling uncomfortable at meeting Lilias, was on the point of making an excuse to walk on. But Lilias detained her and seemed anxious to chat. Anxious, also, to impress Raine whom, she knew, used to be a 'girl friend' of Clifford's—and to boast of her own conquest of that young man.

She persuaded Raine to take coffee and cakes with her, and almost immediately brought up Clifford's name.

Raine, continuing to feel awkward, discussed Clifford cautiously.

'I haven't seen him for a long time,' she said.

Here Lilias chose to become more confidential.

'You might as well know—although Cliff and I don't want it broadcast yet because my father insists on us waiting'—she said, 'that Cliff and I are terribly in love.'

course, most expensively dressed. But rather stupid and she was never one of whom Raine could have made a close friend. *But what did Lilias mean by what she had just said?*

'I don't understand,' began Raine.

Lilias thereupon made everything quite clear. She and Cliff were secretly engaged, she confided, and she pulled a letter from her bag and Raine, with incredulous eyes, recognised the handwriting and listened while Lilias proudly and rather pathetically discussed its contents. 'Cliff was frightfully fed up and longing to get her back in London,' she said. 'Of course you wouldn't know, but this has been going on for ages. It started before the Coronation. Then Cliff went over to Norway, fishing, with Daddy and me, and my aunt, and it sort of settled itself. Only Daddy won't agree to a wedding until I'm of age.'

Raine sat very still. It was as though a curtain had been lifted . . . a curtain of lies, deceit and pretence. Now she could see quite clearly. And as Lilias chatted on, apparently relieved to find someone in whom she could confide, a good deal more of the truth was revealed to Raine. She began to recognise Clifford for what he was; a liar, a cheat, a heartless philanderer. A *fortune-hunter* . . . (that was what Mummy and Gammère had always called him) . . . playing a game with Lilias and herself. If he couldn't get one, he meant to get the other; oh yes! it was plain now, and the dual affair had been going on even when Raine had first been so madly in love with him. *Oh, how could he?* How could any man behave so abominably?

Raine heard Lilias's high-pitched voice:

'Raine, you aren't shocked by all this, are you? I mean . . . I know you used to be rather keen on Cliff. Everybody thought so. And I'm not sure I wasn't a bit jealous of you when I first started going out with Clifford but . . .'

'But there isn't the slightest need,' Raine broke in, and

set down her cup and stood up, very straight and smiling.

'You won't tell anyone until you see the engagement announced, will you?'

'No.'

'Not even Cliff—unless you meet him and he tells you, himself.'

'I don't think,' said Raine, 'that I shall be seeing Clifford.'

Lilias, also standing up, cast a rather puzzled look at the other girl.

'Where are you off to, by the way?'

'To France—back to my grandmother's home—where I hope, myself, to become engaged to the man I love,' Raine announced very slowly and clearly.

And as she had said those words, it was as though the last cloud rolled away and left her standing in brilliant sunshine. With those clouds sped every single regret, every feeling of remorse she had experienced about Clifford. All that was left was pity for Lilias who still believed in him. Perhaps she ought to tell Lilias what Clifford was like—and warn her. On the other hand, it was not her business to interfere, Raine decided. And anyhow, if Lilias was so much in love, she wouldn't hear a word against him. That was how she, Raine, had once behaved. That was how *she* had felt about that most handsome and despicable of men. Poor Lilias must find things out for herself! Maybe if the marriage came off, Clifford would repent and do her justice. Raine didn't care a jot what happened to him. That was certain.

'Will you wish me luck, Raine?' Lilias asked her. 'Cliff's terribly attractive—isn't he?'

The corner of Raine's lips twisted. She bit them as she answered.

'Yes—very. And, of course, I wish you luck. Good-bye, Lilias.'

When she had returned with her great-uncle to the

airport, she sent a telegram to London—to Clifford's office. It was quite short but significant.

Have just met Lilias in Rome. I shall not be seeing you again. Raine.

What Clifford would think and feel when he got that wire she could imagine; even though she might never know, for she did not suppose that Clifford would have the effrontery to write to her again after *this*.

So here she was, waiting for Armand with no regrets and no interest in the past whatsoever. What a wonderful thing! The fate that had seemed so unkind in the past had been on her side *this* time. What could have been more fortunate than that coincidental meeting in Rome with poor Lilias!

The golden silence of the October afternoon was broken suddenly by the sound of a car coming up the hill. Raine saw Hélène carrying a tray out into the garden where the others were waiting for tea.

Raine, from her window, watched with bright, excited eyes, the strip of roadway that she could just see between the trees. Then she caught sight of Gammère's car. Armand would be in it. *He must be.*

She waited; listening to the sound of the vehicle drawing nearer. Then to a commotion in the courtyard; the scurrying and clucking of hens. The bleating of a goat. The slamming of a door.

She waited; her body beginning to tremble, and the warmth of expectancy flowing through all her veins.

She was not disappointed. The studio door opened, and Armand walked in. Armand, as she had seen him a hundred times in the old days, wearing coarse blue linen trousers and an old sports shirt, with a coloured scarf knotted around his neck. He had not waited to dress properly. He had thrown on these things in his [illegible] to get here. But this was how she liked him b[illegible]

some shock she noticed how painfully thin he had grown. Those large dark eyes of his were almost too big for his fine-drawn face. But he was deeply bronzed and at the moment looked well enough with that bright flush on his cheeks. He, in turn, let his ardent and delighted gaze rest upon the beloved figure; Raine looked really well, he thought, and extraordinarily beautiful. She had changed out of a travelling suit into one of her old well-remembered cotton frocks. Her bare feet were in white sandals. Those big gold ear-rings were new and suited her sun-bronzed skin, he thought. Oh, she was *radiant*—and he drank in the sight of her as though his very soul was famished.

They both seemed incapable of speaking for a second, feasting their gaze on each other. Then, lamely, Armand said:

'Welcome home, Raine, *chère* Raine. *Comment ça va?*'

'I am well,' she answered in his own language. She could not stop trembling. '*Et toi?*'

'Very well, too,' he answered.

'I . . . had to see you before you left France.'

He nodded.

'I got your note. I was astonished. I did not think you would be back from Rhodesia so soon.'

'I did not intend to come. Uncle and I were due to return by sea. But I had to change that plan. I *had* to get back at once.'

'Why?' asked Armand with a hoarseness in his voice.

She put a hand up to her throat. A pulse beat in it quite madly. She was so infinitely thankful to see him standing here before her and to know that she was in time, that it almost robbed her of the power to utter all the things which she had come these thousands of miles to say. She stammered:

'I—had a letter from Gammère—telling me that you had taken a job in Canada.'

'That is so.'

his gaze

turn from her. She said :

'Or was it because you wanted to get away from *me*?'

He looked back at her quickly, with a shocked expression.

'Of course, I did not want to get away from *you*. But I thought it—best.'

'*You mean you took it for granted* that I had decided to marry Clifford?'

'Yes.'

[illegible] I [illegible] of my letters?'

[illegible] 'but I had a letter

[illegible]

'From Clifford?'

'Yes.'

'Saying what?'

'Does it matter now?'

'Yes, it's frightfully important. What *did* he say?'

Armand spread out his hands with a very French gesture of deprecation.

'Oh, he intimated that he was sure that you still loved him.'

'Then,' said Raine, in a ringing voice, 'he made the biggest mistake in his life, and you made one, Armand, in believing him.'

Armand caught his breath.

'You mean it isn't true, That you are *not* going to marry Clifford Culver.'

'I am not.'

'Why, Raine—*why*?'

'Because I happen to love somebody else whom I very much want to marry.'

'*Mon Dieu!* said Armand under his breath, 'you have met somebody in Rhodesia—you have come back to tell me so'

Then Raine broke into low, excited laughter. With eyes shining, she walked towards him, hands outstretched.

'*Tu parles!* Oh, Armand, *mon cher, mon trés cher imbecile!* It is you whom I love, and for the second time in my life I am going to ask *you* to marry *me*. Yes—before you go to Canada, so that you can take me with you. That is, if you want me still.'

He gave a cry and reaching her side, caught and held her against him as though he would never let her go again. Wordlessly, eyes shut, he held her to his heart, threading his fingers feverishly through her hair, breathing in the remembered beloved perfume of it. Then he said:

'*Mon amour*. Ah, Raine, *Raine*, never leave me again. Never—for without you my life is nothing. Nothing at all.'

'And mine is nothing without you, my darling,' she said in English.

He thought that English word 'darling' the sweetest he had ever heard. He covered her face and hands with kisses, and then her lips. It seemed as though they could not stop kissing as they stood there in the big empty studio, with their arms around each other. And it was a long time before they were able to speak quietly and Armand learned what had happened to Raine, and of the meeting with Lilias in Rome.

'But I knew it was you for me and you only, long before Lilias told me about Clifford. All that *she* did was to help destroy any feeling of guilt I had concerning him. I know him now for what he really is.'

'I knew it a long time back—when I first met you in London,' said Armand.

And now, at last, Raine learned how Armand had gone to Clifford's office in London just before the Coronation, and the consequences of that visit.

For a moment she was shocked into silence. She could do nothing but touch with her lips very tenderly, the eye

that had been bruised in her defence Her own were filled with tears. She whispered :

'You suffered all that for me, and never said a word. [illegible] cared [illegible] love' [illegible] e you, *ma mie.*'

She threw herself back into his arms with a deep sigh.

'Oh, Armand, I have indeed come home to you and Candella....'

'Will you want to come to Canada? Or shall I ask Monsieur Maçon to release me from the contract?'

'If it is good for your future, we must go. We will come back here. We will have that to look forward to, dearest.'

He kissed each of her hands in turn.

'I thank God for this hour. I thought I had lost all—but I have gained everything. It is almost too much.'

It was her turn to bend her head and kiss his hands.

'I owe you that,' she said. 'You have been marvellous to me right from the beginning. Oh, do let us go out and tell them all. They will be so pleased, particularly Gammère. We will have such a celebration—and nothing shall spoil it this time'

'I must go back to Cannes and fetch that little ring which I packed in my case only this morning. The ring that is still waiting for you.'

'Oh, Armand, how lovely,' she said, and rubbed her cheek against his shoulder. 'What a lovely, *lovely* evening it is going to be.'

'And there is something else I must do,' added Armand seriously. 'I must speak to my director. They have arranged a farewell dinner for me. I will ask Monsieur Maçon if I may bring my fiancée with me, which I am sure he will allow. Then, if it is at all possible, I will ask him to delay my flight to Quebec by one week. I am also sure he will arrange this because it is not vital that I should get there by the end of the week. I *must* have

time to arrange our wedding, Raine. And—after that—well—it will be as though we go to Canada on our honeymoon.'

'That,' said Raine, 'sounds perfect!'

Still with their arms around each other, they walked through the stone corridor out of the monastery into the sunshine.

Adrienne de Chagny, sitting under the cool of the trees facing her herb garden, saw them coming, and knew that all was well, and that her old heart could be at peace again.

They had found each other at last—Raine and Armand. Whatever happened and wherever they went, one day the young couple whom she loved so well would come back here together.

The future of Candella was assured.